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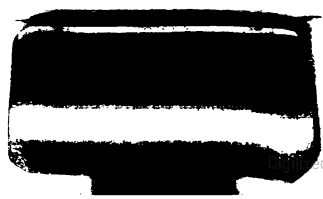


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*The R. Honble
Lord Francis L Egerton
with the Author's very best respects*

DRAMAS FOR THE STAGE.

BY

GEORGE STEPHENS,

AUTHOR OF "THE MANUSCRIPTS OF REDELY," AND OF THE TRAGEDIES "THE VAM-
PIRE," "MONTEZUMA," "GERTRUDE AND BEATRICE," "MARTINUZZI," ETC. ETC.

~~~~~  
Qui mare transcurrit, tandem sibi multa reportet ;  
Qui causas mercesve colit, resplendet in auro ;  
Pauperiei lator picto jacet impius ostro ;  
Quique vias ferro intratas, cito præmia captat,  
Composito ; dat enim reliquis pretium atque vigorem.  
Nominis æterni famam toto orbe sonantem  
Promeret altam,—verum etiam ille ad præmia peccat !

Me miserum ! Sordet nunc sola TRAGÆDIA pannis  
Exuta, Aonidum quamvis pulcherrima ipse !  
Solicitat frustra cives non carmina amantes ;  
Atque inopi lingua neglectas invocat artes.

G. S.

~~~~~  
IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON: INEDITUS.

MDCCCXLVI.

GIFT

London :
Printed by STEWART and MURRAY,
Old Bailey.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

AN ability to construct five act dramas, not unworthy of lasting success in stage representation, has long since been ascribed, in divers reviews, periodical and other publications, by some of the first dramatic critics of the country, to the author of the present volumes, and his conscience inclines him to "plead guilty to the soft impeachment."

At the same time, his inspiration, damped and oppressed by the apathy of the iron and material age we "have fallen upon," which, like Gallio, devoted to the pleasures and pursuits of sense, "cares for none of these things," so, necessarily, is profoundly unenlightened respecting them; remains unaware of their immeasurable dignity in comparison with the mammon-worship and go-ahead mania that recognise their sordid objects in millocracies and railocracies... Vanity of vanities! Sprung of the earth! and, whatever the Babel builders (*curva ad terras anima*) may opine, essentially low and grovelling, and at the best, temporal;* whilst the vast capableness of the poetic

* It is not doubted but the application of scientific productive industry to the purpose of manufactures and commerce, to the

stage for bettering nations and individuals, would seem (under God) in its ethereal and heavenward impulses and tendencies, to be an only less efficient agent than (be it spoken with reverence) the pulpit, prosecuting his labour of love, despite his experience that no WORK OF IDEAL ART proceeding from his brain and pen would be

wants, uses, and luxurious accommodation of a people, must conduce to their material wealth and political importance; but THESE do not imply, or rather are antagonistic to what is the only thing really needful for nations as for individuals—namely, a spirit of *content, humility, and godliness*.

“In the passion of opulence, which may suddenly fail, but cannot continue long, which spares nothing for present gratification, and includes not in its motives any prospect of future blessings, the hopes of immortality are partially eclipsed, the knowledge of ‘our being’s end, and aim’ obscured, and finally shut out.”—“*The Voice of the Pulpit, a series of Essays on various subjects*,” by G. S. Published by C. Mitchell.

The greater the amount of England’s accumulations, the more partially would seem to be distributed her superabundant capital. As a consequence, however, of such social injustice, the more concentrated are the resources of the empire, the more tremendous undoubtedly her strength, and her power “to strike a blow upon the earth that should resound through the universe.”

But to trust to the permanence of such power were to steer by the time-piece and compass, unregulated by the stars. However formidable, humanly speaking, and stable, to all appearance, it is baseless as a summer’s dream, because to a great degree founded upon selfish aggrandizement and unsanctified knowledge; and so long as it is accompanied by dereliction of principle in our legislators and rulers, by judicial blindness of heart in the more affluent classes, and by worse than heathen profligacy and religious ignorance in the lower;—in short, by all those apostacies from God and Nature which are most antipathous to a taste for the refined relaxation of the poetic drama, it is “like a house built upon the sand, and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew, and great was the fall of it.”

permitted to flourish on its proper arena, debarred from which, it can only wither and die; his dramatic fictions virtually smothered by managerial indifference, and himself revolted by that mole-eyed superciliousness which confounds certain ephemeral conditions of the theatre with the "all time" interests of the British drama; Play after play prejudged and pre-doomed, *ere its creation*, on the strength of a foregone conclusion, so, of course, wholly irrespective of any artistical inaptitude of the writer, or artistic mastery whereunto (notwithstanding his having "no means of practice in an art which of all others requires the most") he might possibly have attained; it would argue an excess of vanity on his part, did he not misdoubt the actable qualities of a series of original tragedies and comedies, begun and ended in the full knowledge of so inauspicious an embargo. Nevertheless their conception and execution have been subjected, *so far as he could grope his way in the dark*, to the technical exigencies and requirements of "the boarded space, illuminated with its row of lamps."

Otherwise than was the case in writing his dramatic poem ("*The Hungarian Daughter*"), designed for the calm ordeal of the closet, the author, hopeless of success in his struggle against the force of circumstances, sought, as it were, with the tenacity of a dying convulsion, to keep his primal purpose in view,—that of constructing plays wherein passion, clad in the garb of the imagination, might find its vent and vehicle in poetic action, vividly addressed to the senses of a degenerate people, the descendants of those play-goers whose apprehensive intellects in the golden era of Chapman, Decker, Webster, Ford, &c., stood in need of no palpable and material masonry, albeit, in our dull days, as sub-

servient to an end, its utility, even in an imaginative work, cannot admit of a doubt.

This carpentry it has been his aim to accomplish throughout the present series, not seldom to its detriment in places, if viewed in the light of a literary performance;* and, moreover, he must be excused repeating, in the teeth of his disheartening foreknowledge, that the doors of the two or three metropolitan houses, where the true drama may sometimes be witnessed, have been closed against his productions, or, he might say (and scarcely be using a

* It is feared, however,—for, in truth, the several MSS. are sent to press “with all their imperfections on their head,” not having been “aneled” or purified by means of a single suggestion or correction from a second individual,—it is apprehended that the opening of the tragedy entitled “*SENSIBILITY*” requires condensation. There may appear too much irrelevant matter in the first Act, and in the early half of the second Act, and doubtless (for, however his tact or skill might otherwise have improved by use, he has been allowed no experience) some similar exceptions in respect to the other plays must be obnoxious to critical notice and animadversion.

But it was all along felt, that whatever characterization, sentiment, yea, or even description, was preconcerted, or, at least, comprehended in his original plan, would be absorbed (so to speak) in the *ensemble* of his drama, just as disparted globules of quicksilver, upon contact with the main body, reintegrate themselves; whilst any *mere* poetical soliloquies and discursive passages, that, despite his utmost care, should be struck off in the glow of composition, must touch without mingling; and therefore, like the adscititious ornaments of a twelfth-cake, might be readily separated by the constructor, should the *auri sacra fames*, the superstitious rage of this generation for the gathering of *impedimenta*, as even the heathens styled wealth, yield to serener, nobler, and purer tastes, and he perceive such a propitious change in the prospects of the legitimate drama as to warrant him in transmitting either of the half dozen pieces to any theatre.

metaphor), shut in his face, without the slightest chance, to quote the rebuff of the manager to his offering of the tragedy of "*The Patriot*,"—"without the slightest chance of an opening."*

* The following extract from the preface of Mr. Heraud's elevated, mind-fraught, and, however subdued in expression by his taste, indignant tragedy of "*SALVATOR*," may tend to expose *the system*, and throw a light upon the interested motives of actors and managers :—

"No effective encouragement of the drama is to be expected from a mere actors' theatre, whether governed by many or one. It is evident, that the ruling performers will, as far as possible, absorb all the receipts of the house, in salaries to themselves, and profit to the management, avoiding always the expense of authorship, except when wholly inevitable. For the revival of Shakspeare and the elder dramatists, great credit, accordingly, will be taken; *because to the dead poet there is nothing payable*, and by his aid, the modern performer is put into the position of a man who is author and actor both, and thus enabled to antagonize the *living* author, with almost irresistible power. This is an evil under the sun, not without a remedy, were the attention of THE LEGISLATURE seriously directed to the subject, and *the theatre made, as it ought to be, an important concern of the state*.

"The mere freedom of the stage, however important, as the ground of further reforms, is insufficient of itself for the regeneration of the drama. Equally insufficient too, *in the long run*, will it be for the triumphant establishment of the theatre; for if it were possible, that the *living* Poet could be hopelessly crushed, it would soon happen that the *dead* one would cease to be respected; and finally, the old English drama would want a home as much as the Greek and Latin. In proposing, therefore, the establishment of a theatre in which the claims of the *living* author should be respected, we provide as well for the permanent interests of the histrionic professor himself, though perhaps at the sacrifice of his *supposed* present advantages. Those advantages, however, *being founded in*

But to build up scenes and acts, developing character and evolving, *ab intra*, the leading idea of their respective stories, whether produced or not, read or unread, published or unpublished, is his part in life.

For nearly forty years, "even from his boyish days," the irrepressible bias of his mind has inclined him to dramatic invention and composition; has impelled the thought that came in solitude, to make it populous, and transformed a city to a wilderness.

And if, oblivious that this is a work-a-day world, to be steeped in such abstractions, as a vessel dropped in a sea of bliss, be accounted a sin, it has entailed its punishment

great injustice, should not be suffered to continue for a moment. And in an intellectual point of view the matter is still worse; for thus the Poet's claims are subject to the judgment of the actor, who, in most cases, avoids deciding at all, and, where he does, *is inevitably wrong*. Accustomed to the study of parts only, he contracts an incapacity to estimate the whole. This I might have judged *a priori* to be the case; nevertheless, I had to learn it from personal experience. The whole reason of managerial failure lies in the want of the Poet's superintendence. A theatre, large or small, with a Shakespear at the head of it, could not—did not fail. Without him, it must sink into insignificance. What has been the condition of the Weimar theatre since Goethe relinquished the management? The necessity, that the author of "*Martinuzzi*" was under of renting himself a theatre for a time, proved that the cause of the drama was referred back to its original elements—to an individual initiative. In ancient Greece, the Dramatist had, in the same manner, to hire and pay his own actors.

"But, as they may have already observed, it is to THE GOVERNMENT and ARISTOCRACY of the country that I especially appeal in behalf of a cause which I humbly conceive to be of GREAT NATIONAL IMPORTANCE, and which to the *Living Dramatic Poet* is no less than a *question of life and death*."

in necessary sequence. He might, perhaps, on considering how all his faculties have been engrossed through life by an ideal study, which, where the heart and taste have been duly cultivated therein, swallows, like the rod of Aaron, every rival incantation, and, indeed, every other object for industry under heaven. He might heighten the point of the poet's apostrophe to his muse, and exclaim—

“Thou source of all my joy and all my woe,
Found'st me” not “poor at first,” but mad'st “me so.”

To conclude. Were it only on account of the chilling repression which the impulses divine in their travail of mysterious joy had to endure, the positive revulsion they underwent, from the bitter and ever-recurring consciousness that the transcript he was making of his deep imaginings, his more serious thoughts, and intensest emotions, intentionally and requisitely defective, as a picture that had long lain in a damp place, unless brought within its appropriate vivifying sphere of apprehension; that it was fated *not* to be afforded an opportunity to *flash* upon the sympathies of an audience; a test which is at once the dramatic poet's *right*, and often, alas! the sole means of his *vindication*; the author (were his confidence in his powers, under happier circumstances, even greater than it is) must submit the following “DRAMAS FOR THE STAGE” to the candour of the judicious reader, with considerable and unfeigned diffidence.

High Beech, Essex.

ERRATA IN FIRST VOLUME.

Page	v,	line	16,	instead of full point, insert after railocracies.
—	"	—	18,	dele dash (—) after opine.
—	vi,	—	4,	instead of semicolon, insert after palpit.
—	vii,	—	6,	instead of full point, insert semicolon after drama.
—	23,	—	4,	for loath read loathe.
—	60,	—	1,	from bottom, for dare read daze.
—	169,	—	28,	for heart's read heart.
—	191,	—	26,	for he 'll read hell.
—	290,	—	16,	for queen read quean.

NERO.

A HISTORICAL TRAGEDY,

In Five Acts.

RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED

TO

W. C. MACREADY, Esq.

VOL. I.

B

C h a r a c t e r s .

- CAIUS CÆSAR NERO . . . *Emperor of Rome.*
- MARCUS OTHO . . . *In love with POPPÆA SABINA.*
- SERVIUS GALBA . . . *Does not speak.*
- HELVIDIUS PRISCUS . . . *A staunch Republican : betrothed to ANTEIA.*
- TIGELLINUS { *Palace Prætor ; but secret accomplice of*
GALBA. AN INCARNATE LIE. In love
with ANTEIA.
- NYPHIDIUS { *A Courtier ; but dubious accomplice of*
GALBA. UNSTABLE. An adorer of the
god Plutus. In love with Gold.
- ANTONIUS HONORATUS { *Military Tribune. Agent, and awe-struck*
admirer of GALBA.
- Republicans. } VETUS *A philosophic observer.*
 } SORANUS *Sanguinary.*
 } CASSIUS
- CENTURIONS, TRIBUNES, OFFICERS, SOLDIERS, PRIESTS, AUGURS,
 GLADIATORS, PAGE, MESSENGER.
- POPPÆA SABINA . . . { *In love with OTHO : afterwards Augusta, or*
Empress of Rome.
- ANTEIA { *The daughter of the Republican Martyr,*
PETUS THRASEA ; in love with HELVI-
DIUS PRISCUS.
- JULIA

VESTAL VIRGINS, LADIES, &c., &c.

N E R O.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

The Palace of Otho.

Enter OTHO and Galba's Tribune HONORATUS.

OTHO.

Indeed ! dares Servius Galba march on Rome ?

HONORATUS.

The Jove of men !

I bear him the adhesion
Of half the senate. Were thy name affixed,
Lord Otho, we might spare the rest.

OTHO.

And Galba ?

Proconsul with one legion, just one legion,
Would place his slouching back close up with Atlas !
Is he a man, past seventy, to aspire
To poise the Roman world ?

HONORATUS.

In thy adoption
He will renew his youth. The nonpareil
Marks thee for his successor.

OTHO.

Oh, he'd make me
His Hercules! What me, whose ancestors
Reigned o'er Etruria?

HONORATUS.

In his wisdom therefore
He would clothe thy blood in purple.

OTHO (*scoffingly*).

After Galba!

HONORATUS.

Augustus chose Tiberius for his colleague.

OTHO.

Galba is not Augustus! Nero governs;
Who, I am sure . . . that is, I think he loves me.

HONORATUS.

As loved the Cyclops him of Ithaca.

(*After a pause.*)

His lien on your estate, the all-gracious Galba . . .

(*Stops short.*)

OTHO (*proudly*).

Nero shall give that rebel full discharge.
Advise him so; and thank thy luck, thou 'scap'st
My indignant wrath.

HONORATUS.

I will urge no more, Lord Otho!

(*Aside.*)

Unless a spirit post 'twixt him and Nero,
Athwart the air with this intelligence,
Ere any corporal courier reach Greece
Sage Galba's firmly throned in Rome.

[*Exit* HONORATUS.]

OTHO (*after a long pause of thought*).

The senate

Embark their necks for Galba? Gods! it galls me!—
What, if I were . . . I that was late their god . . .

Rome shakes ! and this eruption is the burst
Of ocean in the earthquake.

Thou ideal

Of sublim'd friendship, loyalty, compel
My soul stand firm, though in the tenderest point
Cæsar bears hard on me !

Re-enter GALBA'S tribune, HONORATUS.

HONORATUS.

We correspond

Hourly with Rome.

OTHO.

By Castor ! what of that ?

HONORATUS.

You 'll change your mind.

OTHO.

I ? Never !

HONORATUS.

Kind occasion

May yet invite——So learn ; Deep Tigellinus,
He too, that mental mine thinks gold, Nymphidius,
Long school'd by fear to bow their supple knee,
And court the times with shows of fair obeisance,
Treat with my invincible emperor.

If . . . Preserve thee !

[*Exit HONORATUS.*

OTHO (*alone*).

Ha ! since the wily Prætor and Nymphidius
Have pledged themselves, it bears an ugly semblance.

(*After a pause.*)

Methinks 't were my best course to feign I 'm tempted
By bait of empire ; unto Tigellinus
Proffer to raise a force in aid of Galba,
With which, against that rebel turned, I crush him.
On bruit whereof, through gratitude, will Nero

Sanction at length, my espousing her whose image
Fills all my soul to bursting.

I recall
Those chaste affections, childlike, but divine,
When woman, in Elysium to be worshipped,
Deems, that she cannot, in return for love,
Love half enough herself . . . Poppæa thus,
And I must let her prescient gift escape,
Take wing unbidden!—Fie!—Last night 't was safe,
Ere Tigellinus his distempering banquet,
Pray Jove that in my cups! . . .

Enter Page.

PAGE.

There 's one without
Craves private speech.

OTHO.

The jewel that slipped hence,
Is 't found?

PAGE.

My lord . . .

OTHO (*angrily*).

The slaves, they search with action
'Gainst purpose.

Let him enter.

[Exit Page.]

When she clipped
My finger with the gold, not more a goddess
The queen of grace looked to Æneas!

*Re-enter PAGE with the Republican HELVIDIUS, his
face concealed in the folds of his toga. HELVIDIUS
signs to the PAGE to retire.*

OTHO (*advancing*).

Jove!

HELVIDIUS (*advancing*).

Coveted friend!

OTHO (*embracing* HELVIDIUS).

Let me enjoy my eyes.

Yet, unrepealed thy banishment, Helvidius,
I dread.

HELVIDIUS.

In absence of this blight of Rome,
I'd join some spirits of the exalted strain
Of our great fathers ; men who, breathing, die,
Being *his* thrall to whom the world's a Circus
To play vile antics in.—At Athens, mimic!
Charioteer, and harpist! gladiator! slave!
But there, as here and ever—gore-dipped tyrant!

OTHO (*with a smile*).

Will the gods never shed upon thy breast
Discretion's cooling dew?

HELVIDIUS.

Thou hast touches in thee
Of the old Roman dignity, through riots
Keep measure with the times. Thou'lt yet redeem
Thy days, when boundless freedom

OTHO (*interrupting*).

Tush! my friend,

We all are subjects fated—if not slaves,
Excepting Cæsar.

HELVIDIUS.

What? Indeed with Cassius
Perished, ye gods! the last of all the Romans?

OTHO.

By Castor! but I hope so, in your sense.

HELVIDIUS.

Otho, come near. This palace Thræsea dwelt in.

OTHO.

I bought it of the state.

HELVIDIUS.

The sweet-soul'd patriot!

(*Solemnly.*) Upon that stool through his corslet gushed
his blood,

Which, with the hollow of his hand, he offered
Jove the deliverer, and dying, said,—

“ Were these drops all tyrannic rage effused,

“ I could forgive Lord Otho ; Cæsar’s arm,

“ Uplifted o’er him, but delays to strike.”

Smil’st thou ? Is nature, freedom weak, with justice
Strengthen’d, to find persuasion ?

(*After a pause.*) I am told,

The tyrant bars your nuptials’ consummation

With the bright paragon of Rome—Sabina.

OTHO.

Ah ! *there* you grieve me, Priscus. Why, I know not ;

But even at the altar, ready-strewed,

As Hymen stood with all his flames about him,

His Questor brought imperial Cæsar’s mandate,

That we must part, for he forbade our union.

My senseless bride was borne back to her home

At Veii ; while I, the weary hours

Drown in the sumptuous bowl.

HELVIDIUS.

And Caius holds thee

For thy tame sufferance, of no more soul

Than the beast he drives i’ the circus.

OTHO.

He’s my friend,

Whom soon I’ll soften, that he’ll fill my arms

With a fair treasure, which he knows I rate

Beyond his empire.

HELVIDIUS.

Charm the gilded serpent

That ’neath thy flowery path with gasping throat

And eye of fire’s on watch ? Join heels to crush him !

OTHO.

Though Thrasea sought the shades, I've not his sickness,
And, please Apollo, mean to shun contagion.

HELVIDIUS.

Counsel is vain!

I lodge with Vetus, cousin
To my betrothed.

OTHO.

To Thrasea's child, Anteia,
All good thoughts. Fly from Rome with her, lest death
Forestall gay Hymen!

(*They move towards the door; OTHO stops short.*)
(*Earnestly, after a pause.*) Were the gods propitious,
Whom think you to invest with sovereign power?

HELVIDIUS (*with enthusiasm.*)

The Consuls, and the ancient laws of Rome!

OTHO (*laughing*).

Jove save us all! . . . The dry bones of the Gracchi!
Your views are dreams. Restore the old republic?
Shade of Fabricius, spare us!

Here's our egress.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II.

The streets of Rome—Night.

*Enter TIGELLINUS and NYMPHIDIUS disguised in the
habiliments of Slaves.*

TIGELLINUS.

The sudden unannounc'd repair of Nero,
Whom we supposed absorbed in luxury's lap
At Athens, drunk with Cyprus wine, or toiling

To gain the Olympic crown, or Pythian laurels,
 Or the dark chaplets of the Isthmian pine . . .
 His presence here in Rome infers, Nymphidius,
 A fatal check to Galba, ruin to us,—
 Unless, in maze of intricate design,
 That ring of Otho . . .

NYMPHIDIUS (*contemptuously*).

Otho ! Prince of bankrupts !
 Vieing in sumptuous ruin e'en with Cæsar !

TIGELLINUS.

Hush ! Nero in his servile shape !
 What folly,
 New-hatched, are we to enact, ere he be wafted
 Back half a day ?

Enter NERO, disguised as a Slave.

NERO.

You have help in hail of voice ?

NYMPHIDIUS.

Behind yon columns, Plutus-honour'd Cæsar !

NERO.

I'll cram thy mouth with gold. Speak as the time !
 Ho, Tigellinus !

TIGELLINUS.

Lord alone on earth !

NERO.

By Jove ! the philosophic wings our soul
 Soars on e'en stoop impatient. Gross fools both !
 Use forms and tongues befitting fellow-slaves.
 Who's that ?

NYMPHIDIUS.

A poor old soldier, please you, Caius.

NERO.

With eyes aloft address'd ? No deep bow wreathed
 To Deity present ? (*Strikes him down.*)

NYMPHIDIUS (*rising*).

Pardon, bounteous prince!

Enter a Soldier.

NERO.

By Hercules! I smack of the Athletes:
Strike down that varlet! Hath no awe.

NYMPHIDIUS *strikes at the Soldier, who returns the blow.*

SOLDIER.

Base scum!

To rise in mutiny!

*Enter several, who attack the Slaves; NYMPHIDIUS
and TIGELLINUS driven off.*

NERO (*sinking on his knee*).

Ho! Rome defend us!

Enter the Republican HELVIDIUS.

(*The Soldier aims a blow at NERO; HELVIDIUS averts it.*)

HELVIDIUS.

The wretch is prostrate: spare him.

SOLDIER.

But a slave!

(*Soldier raises his staff; HELVIDIUS interposes.*)

HELVIDIUS.

And who in Rome's not shackled with his country?

(*To NERO.*)

Rise, fellow-bondman! Boast your frock and slippers,
The while your lords, inglorious, count their paces
To the clink of their own chains. (NERO *rises*.)

CITIZEN.

Why, we were mad

To hear thee.

HELVIDIUS.

Arm in madness, then!

I am

The destined son of Thræsea, who suffered
For the Republic, which, Antæus-like,

In renewed strength shall rise.

Upon that day
Bridge a bold barricade of bleeding bodies
Against your despot.

CITIZEN.

What day?

HELVIDIUS.

When that HE

Perishes,—hasten . . .

*Enter, abruptly from behind, NYMPHIDIUS with
Lictors: NYMPHIDIUS throws over NERO a
purple cloak.*

CITIZEN.

Would within our grasp
That Nero back from Athens ———
(NERO *advancing forward.*)

NERO.

Back, behold him!

HELVIDIUS.

Gods! 't is the tyrant!

NERO.

How I do transcend
The Thunderer, wearying his *own* right arm!
In numbers, like sea-sands, *my* ministers
Launch forth the bolts of Cæsar.
(NERO *points to HELVIDIUS, who is seized: the
populace fly.*)

Wast not banished?

HELVIDIUS.

I saved thy life.

NERO.

Our conscience must condemn thee.
Not out of tyranny, as thou supposest.
To order it stabs me!
(*He averts his face, affecting to weep.*)

HELVIDIUS.

Do I drink the air
That Brutus breathed?

NERO.

Pause there! We'll strike our lyre
To thine expiring breaths. Sublime as when
Great Hercules . . . Hast seen that personation?
How Lucan did applaud! and Seneca
In gorgeous phrase of laboured eloquence,
When I—by what is mightiest—myself!
My end therein a model were to take
Immortal lessons from.

*Enter TIGELLINUS.*TIGELLINUS (*starting at HELVIDIUS*).

Anteia's betrothed!

(TIGELLINUS *whispers* NERO.)NERO (*to Lictors*)

Lictors, conduct Helvidius to prison!

HELVIDIUS.

Alas! for Rome!

NERO.

You enunciate too deeply.
Thou shouldst have seen our Hercules! . . The example
Might stand thee much in use.

[Exeunt Lictors, with HELVIDIUS.(To TIGELLINUS, *eagerly*.)

Arrived?

TIGELLINUS.

Sole Prince!

That ring of Otho would allure Popæa;
As in his vain ebriety he vaunted,
From Veii, quick as steeds could scour the distance.

NERO.

Trained to our palace?

How to spread craft's nets
Well skill'd thou art, Prætor!

TIGELLINUS.

Thinking to meet Otho.

NERO.

Trapp'd to a loftier fortune.

(*Half aside*) Otho's dreams
Are hot and troubled. There's no spell for me
In Tyrian pillows, till his sleeps be closed
In the hallowing urn

NYMPHIDIUS.

Rome's treasure! All his visions,
With fell ambition's active heat informed,
Are of empire . . . of Etruria.

NERO (*with a slight start*).

So near me?

Our time admits no parley.

We must deck us
Like purple-plum'd bird, bedropp'd with gold;
Anoint these limbs before we clasp

(*He pauses and then adds*) Augusta!

TIGELLINUS (*with affected surprise*).

Empress?

NERO.

Sabina! Omen of delight!
With such unutterable stop of the heart
Romulus stood stifled ere he gave the signal;
Then round the warriors every virgin coiled,
And Rome was founded!

[*Exit NERO hastily, followed by TIGELLINUS and
NYMPHIDIUS.*]

SCENE III.

*Hall of Statues in Nero's Palace.*POPPÆA (*alone*).(*Listening.*)That tedious step! (*turns away*)

Achilles to the fight
Ne'er bounded with more agile spring, than would
Dear Otho to these arms.

The imperial palace?
Otho, it must be so,—hath, Cæsar absent,
In token of his favour and relenting,
Been honour'd by . . . Yet for what object *here*?

Majestic Rome! where gods more numerous
Frequent than men! How, like Briareus,
Thou cleav'st the stars with thy strong marble arms!
Or propt'st them up like Atlas! In this temple,
Beneath whose sacred weight refulgent columns
Uplift their flower-ensculptur'd heads to shrine
High-sceptred Cæsar,—'mongst god-breathing stone
A living deity! my pulse-beat quickens
With unaccustomed awe!

Oh, Emperor!
That in thy capital city didst receive
The willing homage of the prostrate world,
The senate's joint applause, and dost command
The riches of the earth, the train of pleasures
That wait on youth and arbitrary sway,
Thy glories thrill my soul!

Enter TIGELLINUS.

TIGELLINUS.

Welcome to Rome, bright dame!

POPPÆA.

Great prætor, health !
Your court'sy were superfluous were my lord here.

TIGELLINUS.

You speak of Cæsar, to whose use and pleasure
Mankind and womankind are subjected.

POPPÆA.

Cæsar is all divine . . . but for Lord Otho ?

TIGELLINUS.

Divine ? He is throned like Jove ! Opposed, his eyes
Flash death at will ; but, soften'd by compliance,
There plays the mounting soul of passion, pliant
As Venus' doves, hard-reined.

POPPÆA.

He is all you speak him. . .
But where 's my summoner ?

TIGELLINUS (*with a low reverence*).

Welcome him !

Enter NERO.

(POPPÆA *rushes to throw herself in his arms. Perceiving he
is NERO she draws back, and makes a trembling obeisance.*)

POPPÆA.

In Rome !

NERO.

Exquisite lady, dash not from my soul
The rubious goblet, which doth swell with bliss,
That gods, and men like gods, might sip the nectar.

POPPÆA.

Most puissant prince, Lord Otho . . .

NERO.

Is repaid . . .
Soulless patrician ! . . . richly he averred,
With Egypt's Prefecture.

POPPÆA.

Repaid ? Repaid ?

NERO.

Gods ! had the vassal soul ? As Plato writes
Immortal all men are, . . though not as Cæsar.
'Tis a moot point. Were Seneca on earth
I would discuss it with him. Why, his soul
Can be but life. .

Then were my horse eternal ;
And so Pythagorus taught.

POPPÆA.

My prince, your pardon ;
For what doth Egypt's Prefecture repay
My heart's betrothed ?

NERO.

Hath sense ? No more than soul,
Within the sphere of this consummate radiance
To have bask'd, and be content to grope in darkness !
The odorous breath, that (with more grateful incense
Than lights on Venus' altars) fills this chamber,
As were to swine Elysium, is to Otho !
All contact with a creature, such as partner'd
With Juno-conscious Jove might make him own her
Peerless, he would forego !—Resign a being,
Who, seated on the throne even of Cæsar,
Will, with her own excess, bedim our brightness !

POPPÆA.

Resign ! Whom speak you of ?

His wonted health
Bears he, Lord Otho, that he tarries thus ?

NERO.

Know you not ?

POPPÆA.

What ? Gods ! Is my Marcus ill ?

NERO.

Hath he not written, then ?

POPPÆA.

What, write?

NERO.

His will.

POPPÆA.

In hoop of gold?

NERO.

The gaud is mine.

POPPÆA.

I pray thee,

Hath Otho — . . Hath my lord? (*She stops short.*)

He is true of mind?

NERO.

Why yesternight he vaunted . . . thou wert by,
 Hey Tigellinus? that . . . It was too shameless . . .
 But he was willing, since occasion offered,
 To cast thee as a speckled robe away.

POPPÆA.

I burn! Oh, Jove! . .

I see you play upon me.

NERO.

In troth, not I. Why, for a proof, that token,
 Transferr'd, of love foregone, and which he styled
 A spell at sight to fetch you cross the world,
 Or you 'd sworn false,—since so you vowed to him.

POPPÆA (*aside*).

That knowledge more than twice ten thousand tokens
 Confirms what Cæsar says. Oh, burning shame!

NERO.

Then as a property set you up for sale.
 I closed with him, and, for the prefecture
 Of Egypt, bought the right to clasp Poppæa.

POPPÆA.

The bitterness of sorrow when he thirsteth
 Give him to drink! . . . (*After a pause.*)

'T is false!

NERO.

Am I not Cæsar ?

Can the gods lie ?

Nay, in his glee, I tell you,
He swore it deeply, thou hadst been o'erfond.

POPPÆA.

My brain ! Did he swear that ?—'T is time to die !

NERO.

He hath not then ? . . .

POPPÆA (*indignantly*).

Sir ?

NERO.

Is 't not true ?

POPPÆA.

True ?—No !

(*Passionately.*) Be never known from dust !(*Dashes the Signet to the ground.*)

Wert thou his life,

Thus would I trample it !

(*Suddenly in a faint voice.*) I 'm struck !

Avenge me !

NERO.

Thy wrath shall have a voice, thine eye shall flash
Olympian terrors !

POPPÆA.

Ha ! The keen-edged falsehood !

NERO.

Thou 'rt born to make this three-nook'd world thy stool,
Tower on the neck of monarchs !

POPPÆA (*bitterly*).

Set my foot

Upon the neck of Otho !

NERO.

Long we have loved thee ;
Long our soul thirsted to behold the being

Whom constantly in weird and muffled hours,—
For so he bragged (when close-tongued love grows bold
'Neath night's capacious cloak), he visited.
Thus Otho.

Till one day, cried Tigellinus,—
“Cæsar, look forth!”

I did; and from my palace
Saw pass the pomp of nuptial ceremony.
Amid the hymeneal throng, the bride
Stateliest appeared, and fixed my eyes, when fate
Smiled from the opening roses on her crest,
As, looking up, she flashed her veil aside.
I viewed a goddess, as I thought, and rightly—
For it was thou! My heart flew out in worship.
Ere the procession passed, thy languid cheek,
With guiltless apprehension, glowing red
Sudden appeared.

“What! lost as soon as loved!”

I cried.

“She's Otho's bride!” exclaimed our Prætor,
“Poppæa; and the holy rites are forward.”
“Haste to her house! We interdict the hymen!”
Thus I broke in, foreseeing that thy breath
One day would awe our Rome; thy virgin hand
Doubling the world I govern!

POPPÆA (*lost in thought*).

I'm an outcast!

NERO.

Why, how my heart doth dance! You talk in music!
(*To TIGELLINUS.*)
Let not our privacy for full five days,
In Ostia, be invaded . . . Who intrudes,—
Were he the trumpet of some new-found world,

Sounds his own doom. I'll know no universe
But 's locked within that space!

(TIGELLINUS bows).

TIGELLINUS (*aside*).

Come, sensual sloth!

Effuse thy opiate fumes, till 'neath thy covert,
Galba surprises empire.

NERO (*apart to TIGELLINUS*).

Dangerous

Is Otho's life.

Proud-crested soldier! Be he
Straight taken off! You'll rip my dear friend's veins!
These tears! How lovely 't is to weep, pronouncing
Death's sentence!

POPPÆA (*in a low melancholy voice*).

I will think no more of him.

NERO.

Dearest, of whom?

POPPÆA.

The dead!

(*As she stoops to pick up the ring*). An idle toy!
At sight of it, I laugh to call to mind,
With what a blind and breathless haste I sprung
Into the curricule.

Oh! never—*never*

Shall I taste fruit of the most blissful hope
I owned that minute?

Gods! what waste I tears for?

I'll dry them with these tangles, where his fingers . . .
That time! O times!

They are cords to choke the false one!

NERO (*exultingly*).

Look out, ye stars, and be unseen! This night
The sun shall envy; while a happier ray
Dances all gaily on our banqueting.

Reign with us, wanton pleasure! Smile, my bride!
Dictatress! Queen of earth!

POPPÆA (*faint and bewildered*).

Oh! lead me . . . Hold me!

I speak I know not what!—I'm all confusion;
A sudden mist o'ercasts

(*With a sudden recollection, emphatically.*)

No, Cæsar, never!

(*Sinking.*) It pulls my heart strings! No!

(*She swoons in the arms of NERO.*)

NERO (*kissing her*).

(*Aside to TIGELLINUS.*) Bless'd felony!

TIGELLINUS (*apart*).

This must breed excellent hate with Marcus Otho,
For which my guerdon be Anteia from Galba!

NERO (*triumphantly*).

Now I play Pluto in cothurnal pomp.

(*To POPPÆA.*)

Unto my heart! Thy cold hand clasp in mine!
'Tis pleasure's best receipt, Proserpina,
The hush preluding ecstasy.

(*To TIGELLINUS.*) Thou dunghill!

Thy statecraft wists not how poetic fancy
Weaves magic colours through the web of life.
I am very Pluto. Bliss of bliss . . . in HELL!

TIGELLINUS (*humbly*).

I, 'mid Cimmerian darkness, still thy creature.

[*Exit NERO, bearing POPPÆA in his arms.*]

TIGELLINUS.

Keep his brain fuming all ye charms of Love,
That he prorogue his state, till Galba seize it!

[*Exit TIGELLINUS.*]

END OF ACT FIRST.

ACT II.

SCENE I.

Apartment in NERO's Palace.

Enter NERO.

NERO.

Welcome, my golden palace !

But the people

Shouted not.

How I loath them ! In their hearts

As if I sat, I know that they revolve,

Each on his central being . . . Save a few,

Less vile.

And what fools they ! their own mere traitors.

Jove ! what import the lives of millions such ?

Thus I one moment from the troubled tide

Of my mysterious soul draw up strange truth ;

The next, who knows what deed the gleaming eyes

Of demons that dwell through me might not prompt,

When reason, like a horse that 's scared by lightning,

Whirls down the abyss !

To play the master prince

Of all the world fumes frenzy to the brain,

Until, worst plague of fiends ! I feel possessed.

Enter TIGELLINUS.

Prætor, you see, we are returned.

TIGELLINUS.

Dread Cæsar !

Unto Rome's longing. And divine Augusta ?

NERO.

Creation's finest extract ! Such was Juno
When she employed Jove's whole divinity,
His universe forgotten !

Sudden pang
Of doubt ! you have removed from face of earth,
Otho, according to our orders, ere
Our sojourning in Ostia ?

TIGELLINUS.

He'd withdrawn
From Rome, but why, and whither, no one knows.

NERO.

Dread Jove ! Place trusty executioners
Upon his track. I am blighted !

TIGELLINUS.

Think him dead !

(*Aside.*)

I'd like to see that man, would touch the life
Of Otho at the head of troops, evoked
In aid, so he averred, of Galba, who,
Ere Nero from his dalliance broke, I trusted
Had summoned Rome.

Enter Officer.

OFFICER.

My lord, there's Thrasea's daughter
Waits in an anteroom, to ask the life
Of Priscus.

NERO (*with a sneer*).

The fond maid !

TIGELLINUS (*aside*).

Anteia, No !

Helvidius dead, thou'rt mine ! (*Aloud.*) A stalwart youth !
The mob who would have slain thee, shrunk apace,
Scattered like ashes 'fore him.

NERO.

Wonder to me,
 Aware, the virtue dwells in Cæsar quickly
 Had spurn'd them from us, he dared interpose !—
 The child of Thrasea his betrothed ? Ha !—
 Summon

The suppliant !

(Enter ANTEIA.)

TIGELLINUS.

Here, my lord *(Approaching ANTEIA.)*
(To ANTEIA.)

Divine Anteia !

ANTEIA *(coldly)*.

With Cæsar.

NERO.

Well, your suit ?

ANTEIA.

To stand 'twixt Priscus
 And your high justice, Emperor.

NERO.

Art o'er-bold.

Thy veins bear Thrasea's blood.

ANTEIA.

'T was all effused,
 Each noble drop he own'd. But spare my Priscus.

NERO.

You think your large-limb'd love might match Alcides ;
 The soul of valour's wanting.

ANTEIA *(proudly)*.

Gaul nor wrestler
 Of all your training but in his embrace
 Were foiled.

NERO *(to Officer)*.

Fetch Priscus.

[Exit Officer.]

He shall battle with

The antagonist I appoint.

ANTEIA.

Turn Gladiator

Through tame respect of life? Not he! He's high-soul'd!

Re-enter Officer with the Republican HELVIDIUS

PRISCUS.

(PRISCUS and ANTEIA embrace.)

ANTEIA.

My Priscus!—Brave Helvidius! To my heart!

HELVIDIUS.

Dear gift of Thræsea!

NERO (*aside*).

Ye are dissolved; but Death

Will bind in ribs of ice.

(*To Officer.*)

Away!

[*Exit Officer.*

(*To HELVIDIUS.*)

I have heard

Of your prodigious feats.

Shalt prove thy prowess,

And earn thy chronicle 'mid shouts of Rome.

HELVIDIUS PRISCUS.

Man! Man! In Rome my grandfather was consul.

NERO.

What imports that?

PRISCUS.

You fret me. What you please.

NERO.

Say that ourself should deign step from our throne?

PRISCUS.

Thou! Caius Cæsar?

NERO.

Yea, Helvidius Priscus.

I do defy thee unto mortal fight,

Armed point to point as gallant Gladiators,
By duel to decide, in view of Rome,
Whose bare right arm is stronger, thine or mine.
Durst thou accept the trial?

PRISCUS (*apart*).

Mighty Jove!

Only avenger! Thanks! One blow for freedom,
Though I halt in the rear of fame!

(*Aloud.*) I grant thy wish.

NERO.

Mehercule!

(*After a pause.*)

We tug to-morrow for the triumph.

Free

I send thee forth.

PRISCUS.

On sufferance? That's a jest!

Freedom doth lodge in each man's own volition.

NERO.

Priscus, thy virtues are too terrible.

PRISCUS.

Such natures burst men's chains.

[*Exeunt the Republican HELVIDIUS, and ANTEIA.*

TIGELLINUS.

I am wrapt in wonder!

Enter OTHO.

OTHO.

Health unto gracious Cæsar!

NERO (*starting*).

Who is 't speaks?— (*Recognising* OTHO.)

My right dear trusted friend, noble Lord Otho!

Welcome as ever to my arms!

OTHO.

How fares it

With Rome's dread Master, that for many days,

Since he so quickly cut the Ionian sea,
He hath been locked, I hear, from all approach ?

NERO.

Whilst dead to the distractions that do wait
On state affairs, awake but to a life
Larded with bliss, so potent, that methinks,
Only the fine capacity of Cæsar
Could taste, and not expire.

OTHO.

You warm my heart.
May Otho learn the source of Cæsar's transports ?

NERO (*turns to TIGELLINUS*).

I'll have thee, master of the games, infuse
The tears of mandrakes in the cup of wine
With which the champions auspicate the heavens ;
They'll lay that hold upon Helvidius' powers,
(*OTHO starts.*)

They lose their functions in the height of action ;
And thus I give him to the gods.

(*Aside.*) So oft,

By enervating my opponent's joints,
Ere now I have achieved the victor-prize.

OTHO (*with alarmed concern*).

Helvidius Priscus, wouldst thou poison Cæsar ?

NERO.

Not at all ! Poison ? He and I are pledged
To single combat, when his nerves of strength
Being locked in drowsy sloth, he yields his honours
To grace our brows immortally.

What matter

Needs now to be transacted ?

OTHO (*aside to NERO*).

Prince ! your Prætor . . .

NERO.

(To TIGELLINUS.)

Stand apart! List! (*Aside.*) Otho affronts his fate!(*Aside to TIGELLINUS.*)Return with strength. (*Whispers*)—(*Then, after a pause,*
significantly aside to TIGELLINUS.)

One stab! drive home! be sudden!

OTHO (*aside to TIGELLINUS*).Prætor, I have been alert since late we spoke,
To expedite levies for the cause you wot of;
Who for their leader have marked *me*, of course.TIGELLINUS (*aside to himself*).How best to blink this order? He were bound,
His powers, each sense and living faculty,
His soul, and its affections unto Galba,
So soon as—Beauteous spell! I'll bid *her* hither.
That sight! like subtle worm, its venom'd way
Will eat to the core of Otho![*Exit TIGELLINUS.*]

NERO.

Share my transport;
I've given my heart a sovereign, Rome an empress.

OTHO.

Espoused so secretly! Her name, my lord?

NERO (*in confusion*).*Her name?*—Ha!—Hem!(*Aside.*) Now, what means Tigellinus
Tardying my orders?

OTHO.

I have news to startle
Such thoughts as Hymen shoots out of the mind,
Enamoured. (*Pauses.*)

NERO.

Hast thou? Tell them!

Quick, bad newsman!

Thou spell'st thy heavy tale to such slow measure,
As 't were the sounding of the dismal flute,
Bidding the deathsman to prepare the pile.
Quick ! lest we miss these tidings ; for, by Pluto !
The cypress, once cut down, moans never more,
Nor saddens, but the day long, o'er the grave.

OTHO.

Servius Galba, to the world's amaze,
Hath broke his loyalty.

The roaring Po

Rolls half his floods unheard through shouting camps.
This news is old a week.

NERO.

Our Spanish viceroy !

OTHO.

Prowls o'er Italia's spoil.

His frosty head

Hath thriven in your hot idlesse.

NERO (*raising his eyes and arm*).

Gods beware !—

The hinges of the world to crack !—*Jove's next*,
Could men but reach him.

Entered Italy ?

OTHO.

His conquering banner shakes, in hopes, o'er Rome,
Where all fall off. Men's staffs wag thick : the senate
Glistens with civil spears.

NERO.

Are we abandoned

Of all ?

OTHO.

Dear emperor ! not so ; Otho breathes ;
Whose soldiership . . . I hope it is no boast . . .

Albeit I have filled my years with loose-girt licence,
Might match the infirm proconsul . . . foil him finely !

NERO.

Thy sword shall sway our fate ! Friend, prithee, put
Fresh garlands on thy head, encounter Galba.

OTHO.

By liberal promises I have raised a force
Of twice five hardy legions—wont to stem
With stubborn nerve the tide, and face the rigour
Of bleak Germania's snows. They are bound to me
By ties confirm'd of int'rest and old liking.

NERO.

Which strengths retain, and deem them but beginnings
Of that we will shower on Otho. State what honours . . .

OTHO (*with a voice of deep feeling*).

Wouldst thou requite me, loose from Veii
My mourning turtle. With Poppæa's hand
Restore, great prince, o'erthrown the approaching Galba,
My soul's long absent peace.

NERO.

What 's that you speak ?

Well, well, away !

(*Flourish without.*)

OTHO.

It sounds Augusta's coming.

NERO (*aside in alarm*).

Were he with his scrambling levies to revolt !

(*Another flourish.*)

OTHO.

I'd pay my humble duty . . .

NERO (*hurriedly*).

When thou greet'st us

With the hoar head of . . . (*His voice fails.*)

(*Aside.*) How my heart doth shake

In mockery of some earthquake !

(Loudly.) What do you wait for ?

Enter POPPÆA, ushered in by a Guard.

(She is gorgeously attired, veiled, and attended : her train is borne up by Ladies. Triumphant music.)

(POPPÆA starts, and abruptly halts. OTHO about to approach. NERO lays his hand upon him.)

NERO *(with great agitation).*

Just now these toys of state are tedious :

We are impatient you were gone.

OTHO *(his eyes intently fixed on POPPÆA,)*

Pray, doubt

Not of my fortune. *(After a pause.)*

May my knees ?

NERO *(withholding him).*

They may not !

Kneel, I on thorns ? Ha, sir ! . . . because of Galba.

OTHO.

Juno, shower down upon this mighty twain

Thy choicest hymeneal joys ! So Otho

With all his heart implores !

POPPÆA *(in faltering tones).*

Strike up, I pray !

High as my heart rebounds ! And make the life
Of jovial music breathe ! Sound !—strain each note

In melody's wide compass ! Louder yet !

Storm trumpets ! Through the portals of the ear

Fill all our souls to bursting ! Music !—music !

(Flourish.)

(POPPÆA ascends the throne.)

NERO *(greatly agitated.)*

Still stand'st thou rapt ?

Why, General of our armies !

You draw the city air ;—'tis penal.

Gods!

Otho is deaf!

OTHO.

Great Capitoline Jove!

Look down, and

NERO (*breaking in with trepidation*).

I am here divinity! . . .

Promise thine eagles victory! Away!

OTHO.

My Emperor! . . . *Friend!* . . . Farewell!

[*Exit* OTHO.]

NERO (*apart*).

My veins and arteries swell again with life:

His tarriance drank my blood. The turn of a die!

Terrible thought! I dare not dwell on it!

Galba's the wolf that ravages our empire.

Otho shall be the lion to appal him.

A noble lion, tame . . . but with ten legions!

'Ware then his wild beast fangs!

That Tigellinus

Should keep this inroad back imports a danger

Greater than that I know.

I bade the trickster

Return and strike!

(*With a demoniac, bitter smile.*)

'Tis but postponed, the blow!

(*Turns to the Assembly.*)

What court is here? None kneel? No motion 'mongst ye?

No word?

(*Approaches the Throne.*)

Vouchsafe, we take in at our eyes,

Like the proud eagle, radiance divine?

(*He moves aside the veil. POPPÆA is discovered senseless.*)

Is this an empress?

Gods! Augusta! Speak!

White emblem of despair ! to make death lovely.
Awake ! That's well !

POPPÆA (*recovering*).

My Otho !

NERO (*fiercely*).

Cankers on him !

POPPÆA (*recovering*).

Where am I ? Cæsar ? Ah ! I do remember !
Stified by that close veil, I must have breathed
My soul away. Thou visit'st me like life.

NERO.

Abstract of all the gods desire—men worship !
How farrest thou now ?

POPPÆA.

Than you can think, more happy . . .
I would that I were free from these quick chokings !

NERO.

Are such spasms usual ?

POPPÆA.

From my youth.

A trick

Of the nerves; and scarce so much. Pray, mark me not,
They'll leave me sooner.

NERO (*fiercely*).

See they do ! 'T were best

Equal thy state by art, thy sexes use.

Or we ! . . .

Beneath their glittering freight, thy breasts
Upheave and fall, like ocean during tempest.
Disgust me not !

Re-enter TIGELLINUS.

(*To* TIGELLINUS.) My orders ? Slave inactive !

TIGELLINUS.

Pardon, most absolute ? Beyond the portal,

A thousand voices shouted out—a ship !
With corn and oil !

NERO.

I would that gnawing famine,
That makes them valiant, ate into their livers !—
Well Varnished Policy ?

TIGELLINUS.

With that a scream :—
The vessel's laden, not with grain, but sand !

NERO (*interrupting*).

Sand of the Nile, to absorb Helvidius' blood
To-morrow in the Circus !

I am wild

To view this precious cargo.

(*To POPPÆA.*)

Will you license

Our absence ?

POPPÆA.

I have no will, my lord, but thine.

NERO.

Good !

(*Bitterly*) And best never breathe that name again.

POPPÆA.

What name ?

NERO (*with a scream*).

What name !

(*With increasing passion.*)

Our bounty, earth-born vapour !
Hath drawn thee in a lucid orb, and of thee
Made a world's gaze. Then couldst of meaner mortals
Prove fond ; thou 'rt hewn to shreds . . . stabb'd to the
heart !

POPPÆA.

Alas ! what do you mean ?

NERO (*with tremendous rage*).

Nay to the soul !

I'll have it torn from life immortally.
Thou art well warned!

Sleek Tigellinus, forward!

[*Exeunt NERO, TIGELLINUS, and GUARD.*]

(*POPPÆA stands for some time aghast; then with forced hilarity,*)

POPPÆA.

Ladies, be gay! There's not a sand of life
Should drop without some pleasure. We our reign
Will make one revel. Not an eye at court
Do aught but sparkle bliss! Mine, *mine* shall glow,
In their own proper radiance, bright with splendour!

JULIA.

So light of heart! We will quaff wine like Tiber . . .
If ladies might.

POPPÆA.

I'll introduce the fashion.

'T were good to steep our sex's delicate sense
In Bacchanal oblivion; It suits us!
Let men be soothed by founts of liquid crystal,
Whose lulling falls attune their pebbled channels,
Our Lethe be Falernian—and—loud laughter!

JULIA,

'T will be the top of mirth.

POPPÆA (*aside*).

So Etna's side

Glad with unfading verdure, while fierce flames
Prey on her wasted entrails. (*Aloud.*) Wave along
Giddily jocund as the world recedes.

JULIA.

And swing through space.

POPPÆA.

Like blossomy twig when air groans.
Our souls shall reel like any nightingale

That tunes on shivering wing her tipsy song.
Who 'll taste of present pastime? I 'm for forfeits.

[Ladies gather round the throne.

Re-enter OTHO.

OTHO.

Forgetful that I was!

I were to blame!

Left I the city, Cæsar unapprised
That Tigellinus' and Nymphidius' smiles
Ambush his ruin.

As for Priscus' views,
They are chimerical . . . not worth divulging;
And I will warn him sparingly to pledge
To-morrow in the Circus.

Where is Cæsar?

What! gone? But still Augusta sits enthroned.

POPPÆA.

Not even, unless Nemesis inspire,
In this world. (*Perceiving OTHO.*) Ha!

[She shrinks and turns pale.

JULIA (*alarmed*).

What is 't? Augusta! Madam!

Orcus invests thee with his shade about,
And from his crown drops sulphur on thy cheek.

POPPÆA (*recovering*).

I 'll shake it off! Behold my festal wreath
Ærial crimson falls, our countenance
Flushing with orient hue!

Come, quicken time!

OTHO (*looking entranced on POPPÆA*).

I suck the juice of hemlock! What a flood!
'T is Phlegethon! A lonely wreck I toss,
The wild waves raving round me, who am wilder!
No other hope!

'T is no unreal form!

Love sees through all disguise . . . 't is she herself!
Her shape, complexion, air, grace, height, and all
Her other matchless horrors!

POPPÆA (*aside*).

He repents
Now he beholds me! How that thought swells here!
[*Her voice sinks inarticulate.*]

OTHO.

Earth hide me from the vision! Nay, I'll brave it.
Stand back! I will not be withheld!—Sabina!
[*Falls at her feet.*]

POPPÆA.

This officer hath business!

OTHO.

And her voice!

POPPÆA.

Lead hence, my dears.

(*POPPÆA descends from the Throne.*)

OTHO.

Great Jove! She turns averse!
Something I had to say . . . One little moment,
Indulge me! See these foolish tears.

POPPÆA.

Sound trumpets!

OTHO.

'Tis all a mockery! What, not a look!
Not one word! Gods! Gods! Gods!

POPPÆA.

Pray let's withdraw . . .
For ever . . . from all eyes!

OTHO (*faintly*).

Thou false heart, stay.

POPPÆA (*proudly*).

Respect our station!

Enter NYMPHIDIUS behind.

[Exeunt POPPÆA and train.

OTHO (*sinking on the floor*).

She has wrenched my heart!

'T is broke—I hope 't is broke, and this deep darkness
Death's gloomy pall.

(The Scene closes.)

END OF ACT SECOND.

ACT III.

SCENE I.

Apartment in VETUS's Palace.

*The Republicans HELVIDIUS, VETUS, SORANUS, and
CASSIUS assembled.*

VETUS.

A mere beguile. The clouded maze of fate
Nero o'erspreads with nets.

HELVIDIUS.

Nay, clear-eyed Vetus!
I make no doubt he'll pitch his strength against me.

VETUS.

I fear some subtle practice.

HELVIDIUS.

Troth not I.

You stand resolved on freedom?

VETUS.

I can search . . .

HELVIDIUS (*without heeding VETUS*).

The antique forms and types of the Republic,—
The Consuls' government,—our hallowed laws?

VETUS.

. . . The heart of things; so doubt of lurking snares,
And snaky labyrinths. (*After a pause.*) The order of it?

HELVIDIUS.

I have sounded many senators, who wait
But Cæsar's fall to give to fate the event.

VETUS.

I distrust Otho.

HELVIDIUS.

He's a nobleman,
Dear to my heart as drops that bubble there;
With whom I've served, fought, revelled. But, alas!
He stands before our path, the tyrant's buckler,
Unless with Cæsar we . . . (*Turns aside and weeps.*)

VETUS.

You are right, Helvidius;
The man who cannot, as his various means
Permit, restrict himself, must be or native
To tyranny or a tyrant; therefore . . .

SORANUS (*interrupting*).

Blood!

Enter Attendant.

ATTENDANT.

There's one without who . . .

Ah! he is here, my lord.

(*Enter hastily one disguised; his robe over his face
speaking as he enters.*)

STRANGER.

As I thought, Priscus and the rest.

VETUS.

Thy business?

STRANGER.

I come unbidden to a glorious banquet:
Your knives are keen, and prime the boar you'd carve,
But yet unserved.

[*VETUS motions to Attendant, who exit.*

VETUS.

(*To Stranger.*) Thy words are tropes, wherewith
Thou paint'st the air.

STRANGER.

Your lofty fellowship,

My lords, I'd join.

HELVIDIUS.

What merit canst thou claim

To hope to share from us so great a glory

As thy aid comes to ?

STRANGER.

Bitter injury,

Which makes me capable of all things !

(After a pause of anguish). Foul

Desire, like gore about my fractured heart ;

Disdain and hate of mine own self ; Despair,

Which mocks itself with smiles ; Disgrace that sears,

Closing her tearless lids to see more clear ;

The writhing sense of benefits requited

With sufferings, that clasp me like remorse ; . . .

These are *my* titles. Tortures !—desperate wrongs !

Joy turned to pain !—and love within my veins,

Crawling like agony !

HELVIDIUS.

A bitter spirit

Thy words do indicate.

Who's he that smote thee ?

STRANGER.

There's not in Rome a soul so loudly called

To his redress, as I.

: . . . The crown'd pestilence.

Spread on and on, and reached me in my slumbers ;

But there's a healing wave ye'll set a flowing

Must wash away these plague-spots . . . Caesar's life blood !

VETUS.

We doubt thee not ; but yet what pledge, thou wilt

Be staunch,—though outraged as thou sayest ;

STRANGER.

Helvidius,
Thou hast to engage with Cæsar in the Circus?

HELVIDIUS.

'T is so resolv'd.

STRANGER.

When Tigellinus smiles,
Brimful of hate, the wine cup in his hand,
With cool reserve of lips light-touching, take it;
Lest your nerves shrink, and, as a hollow fruit,
Though bright, shakes sudden down to earth, you fall,
By the quick blast o'ercome.

VETUS.

I feared as much.

HELVIDIUS.

So wouldst betray *our* secret.

STRANGER.

Didst thou ask
A pledge? What say you to some dozen legions,
Led by myself? . . . A host in such a cause!

HELVIDIUS.

Ha! Can it be? Unfold thee!

(*Stranger discovers himself to be OTHO.*)

CASSIUS (*drawing his sword*).

Damn'd spy!

VETUS (*drawing his sword*).

Lord Otho, from some wild debauch!

SORANUS (*drawing his sword*).

He dies!

(*The Republicans attack OTHO who throws himself into the
midst, and drops his sword.*)

HELVIDIUS (*interposing*).

Hold! first let 's hear him!

VETUS.

Strong necessity
Constrains his death ;—Spare Otho, you 'll repent it!

OTHO.

Come the foremost forth !
The mightiest of ye ! Let him stand before me !
For he is great that dares to strike at Otho !

VETUS (*with emphatic earnestness*).

Even as the light that shows the lurking rock
My voice is truth ;—Avoid his fellowship !
Though 'scaped the walls where frowning pestilence
Spreads wide her livid flag, he needs 'lustration.

HELVIDIUS (*to* OTHO).

Thou art Cæsar's staunchest soldier !

OTHO.

Yesterday !

To-day I hope to strengthen e'en the strong,
Arching their brows with triumph o'er their tyrant . . .
O'er him, whose death-pangs writhe before me still,
While on the pillow of revenge I dream,
But cannot taste repose.

HELVIDIUS.

When last we spoke
Thou mock'st at freedom and our cause.

OTHO.

Since then,

Poppæa, my betrothed, hath been betrayed
To wed the ravenous despot, whose desires
Shall, like the biting of the envenom'd aspic,
Steal him to hell.

HELVIDIUS.

Thou, noble Roman to my heart ! Take part
In the great change we meditate (*They embrace*).

OTHO (*after a pause,—significantly*).

My lords,

Your enterprise, methinks, can only thrive
As I see good . .

HELVIDIUS.

We had thriven in your despite.

OTHO.

Tied to my awe the soldiers' arms, and mine
Their hearts; the people love me . . .

(*After a pause.*) Ye, my friends,
Were potent as myself, were my rank Cæsar.

HELVIDIUS.

The worth of liberty were little known
So easily relinquish'd. Gods! I swear it,
More welcome far the fate of Petus Thræsea
To Priscus, than the sight of a successor
To this vain-glorious Cæsar.

OTHO (*taking him tenderly by the hand*).

Not if t' were
Thy dearest friend who owned that title?

HELVIDIUS (*indignantly*).

Otho!

The first prince was a murderer, who to hide
The bloody stains of some detested deed
Assumed the purple.

Think'st thou, I would let thee . . .

OTHO (*with assumed surprise*).

Me, Priscus?

HELVIDIUS.

Sooner these hands strangle both!
And whilst we sought the eternal shades, upon thee
The venom of my hasting soul I'd sprinkle.

OTHO.

Thou dost mistake. I aimed not so to shroud me.

VETUS (*to Otho*).

There is a noisome vapour unperceived
By gross corporeal sense, though it be rank
As stench that's wafted from sulphureous pool,

Or poisonous weed obscene. I much misdoubt
You would shroud guilt 'neath our integrity.

OTHO.

Forbid it Jove's own grace! My theme was woe.
(*To HELVIDIUS.*) Be wary: Seem to offer up libation
Before you joust, but drink not.

HELVIDIUS.

That thou 'rt true

The powers be prais'd!

OTHO.

I 'll straight prepare my cohort

For the event.

HELVIDIUS.

Which, like a mettled steed,
Restrain'd, awaits the moment to start forth.

OTHO.

My strengths shall be your guard.

We meet in vengeance!

HELVIDIUS.

Freedom! in freedom, Otho!

VETUS (*aside*).

My soul's sad!

[*Exeunt Republicans and OTHO.*]

SCENE II.

(*A Walk in the Gardens of the Palace, on the one side a
Guard-house: the Palace in the distance.*)

(*Enter TIGELLINUS and NYMPHIDIUS.*)

NYMPHIDIUS.

This craft 'gainst Priscus will remove your rival
Godward.

TIGELLINUS.

Those finer arts, which rule mankind,
He knows not. Dream he out his dream of Cato !

NYMPHIDIUS.

Yonder is Otho ?

TIGELLINUS.

By appointment, waiting
My signal. He's a rock on which had shivered
Our plot, but for that rape . . . my brain's device !

NYMPHIDIUS.

Why should he sway the empire after Galba ?

TIGELLINUS.

Arms and the man is Otho ! To inferior
Terms he'd not hearken.

For life's sweetness centred
In fair Anteia I stip'late.

NYMPHIDIUS.

Galba haggles
With *me*, the grey-beard.

Who, thinks he, save Otho,
Worth thank ye ?

Talk of arms !

That iron world
It is worn out, the golden's come !

TIGELLINUS.

Take gold
That's offered quickly then.

NYMPHIDIUS (*doggedly*).

I doubt. To limit
The due reward that waits such service ! Nero,
For *his* whims, nothing spares.

TIGELLINUS.

From side to side
No longer sway your mind. You've no choice left
Necessity must fix you. Galba's horse . . .

Enter NERO.

NERO (*eagerly*).

Tidings of him and Otho?

Have they fought?

TIGELLINUS (*starting, but quickly recovering himself*).

I told you, Otho's vain report had ill

Excused my entrenching on your nuptial joys

At Ostia.

NERO (*sternly*).

How, my subtle Palace Prætor?

Lord Galba's venture's not so slight.

TIGELLINUS (*confidently*).

The rebel

Beyond the Alps trails back his close-furl'd standard.

NYMPHIDIUS (*aside*).

His ready wit's still present to itself!

NERO.

Galba in full retreat? The gods have reason!

See that to-morrow's sports, as I would wish them,

Go off.

(*Waves TIGELLINUS from him.*)

Nymphidius!

(*NERO and NYMPHIDIUS move apart.*)

[*Exit TIGELLINUS slowly and reluctantly.*]

All that matter fills

The waste of thy cold visage,—give it breath.

NYMPHIDIUS.

Where you broke in in anger, that Augusta? . . .

NERO.

Keep in the word, and—softly! So they spoke?

NYMPHIDIUS.

Briefly that time.

NERO.

We are quite alone! Is't true

That palm met palm?

NYMPHIDIUS.

I've proof.

NERO (*fiercely*).

Ye broad, plague-breathing! . .

(*More calmly*) Go on: I'm greedy for it!

NYMPHIDIUS.

Near the palace

The general loiters still . . .

NERO.

Earth's naked chasms

Swallow them! both! I'll crush them . . . quite to dust!

Now for the proof?

NYMPHIDIUS (*pointing*).

Believe your eyes. There's Otho!

NERO.

I'll execute some awful . . . (*Stops short.*)

(*In a voice of apprehension.*) Twice five legions! (*Pauses.*)

Comet of empire, whose portentous blaze

Must, as a spark, be trodden out! Nymphidius!

NYMPHIDIUS.

I am here.

NERO.

A mandate for his death.

(*Aside.*) His need

Is past the Alps with Galba! Vengeance grinds,

Safe-striding from his grisly den, his teeth!

NYMPHIDIUS.

The Court of Guard?

NERO.

No: this way . . . to forge thunder!

[*Exeunt NERO and NYMPHIDIUS.*]

Enter OTHO.

OTHO (*looking around*).

No Tigellinus?

(*Comes forward.*) In to-morrow's fight

Priscus to Pluto's cloud-black realm speeds Cæsar,
Inglorious; when the great end of my vengeance
May blossom into fruit.

Then soars my fate,
New-plumed with eagle-wings, this vulture Galba
To bring to earth.

My spirit lacks excitement.

[Retires up the stage.]

Enter POPPÆA.

POPPÆA.

Why goes he not to Egypt Prefect, Otho?
Why lags in Rome?—about our very palace . . .

(Starts.)

That's he! I'm spell-bound!

(Suddenly.) I will return the ring

Whose fatal mission . . . *fatal?* One word more . . .

One more such ominous thought! . . .

OTHO.

Ah! ah! she is there!

She with the arrogant name, that was Poppæa!

POPPÆA.

Light heart!

I feel light too, but 't is my brain . . . my heart

Is heavy!

(She approaches.)

OTHO.

Prodigy of all thy sex!

POPPÆA.

One effort, and 't is done!

I . . . I forgot

To thank thee.

Knowing my deserts might challenge
Empire, to Cæsar you transferred my hand;
We are obliged.

OTHO.

My blood's in tumult! What?

POPPÆA (*reproachfully*).

Divorced for Africa!

OTHO.

Not all the acres

Elysium owns had bought thee of my love.

POPPÆA.

Thou loved'st me not! What am I? Still as night
My spirits all stand listening, while thou swear'st.

OTHO.

What should I swear?

POPPÆA.

That as a speckled robe

You cast me off!

OTHO.

By these great tears!

POPPÆA.

Go on!

OTHO.

By my wrecked hopes! By truth's eternity!
By death, invincible on earth! By love,
That doth outlive despair, and conquer death!
By the sweet bliss, love's proper food, I looked for!
By the sharp pangs of equal souls divided!
By all the leanness of a heart, that's ravished
For ever from its tenement! I swear. . . .

POPPÆA (*breaking in*).

Ay, that thou lov'st me not . . .

OTHO.

That thou to me,

Than moisture to the earth, or light to Phœbus,
Blood to the heart, or being to the gods
Wert more essential—Oh! Thou wast my home,
My peace of soul, my mine of happiness,

My sacred lamp, my joy, my hope . . . Thou wast!
Thou art. . . . Oh! why didst use me thus, Poppæa?

POPPÆA.

On what a precipice I'm standing. Sir,
Didst thou not sell me for . . .

OTHO (*interrupting*).

Sell *thee*? No! no!

POPPÆA.

The government . . .

OTHO.

No! No!

POPPÆA.

Of Egypt?

OTHO.

NO!

POPPÆA.

My brain's on fire! Thou art forsworn.

OTHO.

Why, then

May conscious Jove pash me to nothingness!

POPPÆA.

Fie on't! By this (*Holding out the ring*)

Thou wrung'st my forced consent

To yield to Cæsar my repenting hand.

OTHO.

Oh, Fate! Why lash thy slaves into their tomb?

List to a horror!

POPPÆA.

Not the dead more silent.

OTHO.

Late up at revels, plied with wine, while healths
Flew with full wing, where right in fortune's shot
Fluttered that jewel,—'t was hit, and . . .

POPPÆA.

But avouched

An aim more fatal !

Nero swore, my love
Thou hadst blemished and renounced ; repeating words
Of mine, which

OTHO (*stamping violently*).

Riotous madness !

POPPÆA.

Fate, my lord,

Took the occasion. Mortified and stung

OTHO.

Ignoble prince ! Did I for this reject
Galba's great bribe ?

POPPÆA.

I yielded not ! Some fury
From burning Acheron snatched a sulphur brand,
And threw it in my bosom. Then all impulse . . .

(*After a pause.*)

Night, fall upon me ! Turn thine eyes away !

OTHO.

I cannot bear thy beauty !

POPPÆA.

Fumes of hell
Flew to my brain ! The rites were spells of wine.
They seized my escaping hand, as, sore beset,
I swooned.

What could I *then* do, Otho ?OTHO (*with piercing energy of voice and action*).

DIE !

POPPÆA.

Unkind ! These tears ! Don't hate me, Marcus.

OTHO.

Thus—

Thus I forgive you from my inmost soul!

(He takes her passionately in his arms. They continue speechless and motionless for some time.)

POPPÆA.

So crush me to thy heart! Good!

Now, my lord,

Let's say farewell for ever.

OTHO.

Why then cling

POPPÆA.

Through fate, or idiocy of will, I am,
 Alas! the Emperor's wife . . . 't is fixed . . . 't is past—
 'T is absolute despair! Yet, until death
 Waft me or Cæsar to the Stygian banks,
 I swear my loyalty, above suspicion
 Shall stand.

So pure the oath, its sanctity
 Were hurt if e'er we meet again.

OTHO (*with low, slow accents*).

Till Cæsar

Shall visit Pluto's dark domain?

POPPÆA.

May Jove

Pour from his urn, like dew, those blessings on thee,
 Will sprinkle this sad heart no more.

(*Going.*)

OTHO.

Nay, cheer thee!

Enter Nymphidius behind.

The tyrant's doomed!

He hath challenged to the fight
 Helvidius; in hopes—his wine being drugg'd,

To snatch a furtive victory : which practice
I have opened to that gallant ; who, abstaining,
Cæsar is sacrificed !

POPPÆA (*turns from him*).

I cannot speak !

OTHO.

Like raven, ere I stoop, presentient,
I await apart the vast confusion.

POPPÆA.

That

You had veiled these horrors ! Ha !

OTHO.

I greet thee next,

No more the spouse of

POPPÆA (*interrupting*).

Ha ! beware of guilt

Against the gods !

OTHO.

If auguring hopes and justice
Meet in one point o'er which a glory sits,
It is my *fortune* !

Be it guilt,—success,
Which the proud virtue of this prudish world
Fawns on, will cover—whiten it to law !
'T is that which colours life !

POPPÆA.

I pray the gods

Preserve thee innocent !

OTHO.

From thy sad wrongs,
Will flow our triumphs, e'en as night's pale queen,—
When seas swell high, inspires the distant tempest,—
The ruin is all her own. Farewell ! [*Exit* OTHO.]

POPPÆA.

What fear

Sits heavy on my soul?

In Otho's speech

I note unnatural rapture, and . . .

(NYMPHIDIUS comes forward: she starts.)

Just Powers!

Nymphidius!

NYMPHIDIUS.

Who hath happily o'erheard

Your plot to circumvent and slay your lord,—

To whom I'll straight unfold ye.

*(Going.)*POPPÆA *(staying him)*.

You'd impeach

Of crimes, that bear no name nor likelihood.

We spoke of honourable duel. How

Can that be wrong to Cæsar?

NYMPHIDIUS.

How? When Otho

Warns Priscus not to drink? Great Cæsar's car

Turns to a mournful bier, unless, his doom

Averted by discovery, he shun

The invincible Helvidius' nervous gripe.

For Otho! . . . *(After a pause.)*

Not o'er Cæsar spread their shears,

The eternal Destinies.

POPPÆA.

But over Otho?

You shake my brain!

*Re-enter OTHO.*OTHO *(to POPPÆA)*.

The guard is on my track;

And all the ports are closed.

POPPÆA (*motioning with her finger to NYMPHIDIUS*).
Nymphidius' orders !

OTHO.

'Tis plain ! The nets are spread ! I am in the toils !
But—(*Drawing his sword.*)

In the red flame of the hunter's torch
(*Waving his sword.*)

Thus glares the tiger's eye !

(*He springs upon NYMPHIDIUS.*)

NYMPHIDIUS (*drawing his sword*).

Quick, ho ! The guard !

(*They fight.*)

(*NYMPHIDIUS is thrown on his knee, and disarmed.*)

NYMPHIDIUS.

What ransom for my life ? 'Tis precious !

OTHO (*with a sneer*).

Precious ?

Till the rich crisis of that just revenge,
By Priscus' hand impending, you are debarr'd
Access to daylight ; but your precious life
Be safe as unsunn'd silver of the mine !

NYMPHIDIUS (*aside*).

Rich ransom lost, fool Lord !

OTHO.

I must enforce

The loan of that fine robe.

NYMPHIDIUS.

The loan ! my toga ?

OTHO.

Your toga !

Dally not !

(*Raising his sword.*) You apprehend me !

(*NYMPHIDIUS unrobes. OTHO throws his military cloak
over NYMPHIDIUS.*)

OTHO.

You make this serve instead. And for the nonce,
I . . . (*He clothes himself in the toga of NYMPHIDIUS.*)
. . . Stay a little. While within your zone
I pinion you, so!

(*OTHO secures the hands of NYMPHIDIUS in the belt of his tunic, and then takes his helmet off his head, and places it on that of NYMPHIDIUS.*)

Now, veil your face
In that capacious fold.

Sir, thus!

You are perfect.

And mark me! but a sign, breath, stir to prompt
Suspicion, like those bowels of earth you wot of,
You are rifled by cold iron of your metal.

Enter Guard.

OTHO (*his face hidden and averted*).

He is o'ercome, Lord Otho.

Press not rudely,
But at my bidding by the Emperor's mandate,
Pierce him . . . one hesitating step, to death!
(*The Centurion opens the gates of the guard room.*)
(*To NYMPHIDIUS.*)

On Lord! We follow.

(*As they are entering the guard-room.*)

Enter NERO behind.

NERO.

Halt ye! Every one!

(*OTHO, his grasp on the arm of NYMPHIDIUS, and guard stop short.*)

NERO (*in a low voice*).

Under arrest this traitor imperator!

(*Sees POPPÆA.*)

Hath been with thee? Alone without a lictor?
Poison of toads betwixt ye!

POPPÆA (*aside*).

Though I split
In the fierce struggle, I 'll resume myself.

(*Aloud.*)

I knew not

NERO.

Out, you sallow-coloured thing!
Lip-modest, but heart-hollow!

(*Advances to OTHO: aside to him.*) For this deed,
Thy wish shall rise on golden pillars, Nymphidius.
To Justice' iron hand convey him!

(*Significantly.*) Well!

Might have been better! . . . Lack you apprehension?

(*OTHO bows with averted face, concealed in drapery:*

Nymphidius attempts a sudden move towards NERO;

OTHO seizes and fixes him, presenting his sword.)

NERO (*wildly*).

You 're right! Goad! Kill!

OTHO (*in a low voice to Nymphidius*).

A breath, you perish!

NERO (*aside to OTHO, impassionedly*).

Pant we,

As in the midst of pestilence, or chained
To caves where basilisks breed, and dost thou pause
Ere breathe fresh air in th' face of fainting honour?
Shame wars on the name of Cæsar! who stands forth
His own avenger!

(*NERO makes a pass at Nymphidius, which OTHO intercepts.*)

Nymphidius.

Spare me!

NERO (*in astonished voice*).

How?

OTHO.

On! On!

POPPÆA (*advancing in terror*).

(*Aside.*) I shudder.

NERO (*to POPPÆA*).

Tartarus! Sob! Sob! Sob!—What mean
These rebel freaks of nature?

POPPÆA (*confused and agitated*).

I would say,

He is not worth your anger.

OTHO (*to NYMPHIDIUS in a low voice*).

In, like thought!

Or I revoke the impledged boon of life.

(*NYMPHIDIUS is hurried into the guard room, the portals
are closed upon him.*)

NERO (*to POPPÆA*).

Not worth my anger, Otho?

POPPÆA (*in trepidation*).

Nay: Not so!

I meant not him.

NERO.

Whom then?

But you spoke sooth.

I mark'd him crouch when I upraised my spear,
Like craven hound beneath his master's lash,
I heard him plead—beheld him . . .

All ye gods!

Is that he stands before me?

OTHO (*who had thrown off his disguise, indignantly*).

Otho plead!

Said you I crouched?

My heart, swoll'n, bursts these ribs
Though made of brass.

Wert thou the Thunderer's self,
And bore his lightnings in thine eyes, I'd cry
Thou liest! and dare thee,—*thus!*

(*OTHO advances and faces NERO.*)

Enter TIGELLINUS.

NERO (retreating).

Secure him ! Keep him !

With axes off from me !

Who throws his head,
Receives its weight in gold.

OTHO.

Who moves towards me,
Lies at my feet a corpse !

TIGELLINUS (apart to OTHO).

You 'll find an outlet
Through the north portal.

NERO.

Tigellinus, seize him !

OTHO.

I 'm Otho ! and a sword lift up that, guided
By this right arm, would quail a troop of fiends.
They 'd shun the stroke, as ye do now !

(*OTHO rushes through the guard and exit.*)

NERO.

Pursue him !

(*Exeunt TIGELLINUS and guard.*)

All follow. Halloo to the guard on duty ;
Their slings may reach and tell.

He stands at bay.

Oh, rage !

Thanks, Otho ! Smite to earth the cowards !
He turns : They 're hidden : May they cleave him down ?
(*Turns to POPPÆA.*)

Dost not respond that pray'r ?

Look up ! All clear ?

(*Apart.*)

I envy her her mastery ! When eyes,
Fiercer than fire, of phantasms set on me,

They quit not so, but, on my astonished will,
Gorge, till I exult in loathsome sympathy ;
Then, as vexed ocean brings to light her wrecks,
I vomit forth destruction.

Re-enter TIGELLINUS.

TIGELLINUS.

Otho hath

NERO.

Perish the name !

High premium, plotting fellow !
Hast offered to the man who brings him in ?
If dead, be it doubled.

From our thoughts !

(Looking towards guard-room) That earthworm,
Nymphidius, may he, incarcerate, starve !

(Turns to POPPÆA.)

Specious damnation ! Could I e'er imagine,
That since my warning, you o'erfond . . . I'd dash thee . . .
Start not . . . I would . . . to atoms !

Keep fair distance !

[Exeunt.]

END OF ACT THIRD.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

(A crowded Amphitheatre, presenting 80,000 men and women. Senators, Equites, and Ambassadors, seated in the Podium. NERO and POPPÆA in the centre of the Podium, on elevated Thrones, covered with a Canopy. On the one side of the Throne, TIGELINUS, standing; on the other side, the Vestal Virgins, seated. A Grand Procession. The images of the Gods led along on carriages, and on men's shoulders. A long train on horseback and on foot. Next follow Gladiators, Dancers, Musicians, &c. &c. &c. The Consuls and Priests cross the stage to perform sacred rites, attended by the Popæ, leading a sheep adorned with fillets, ribands, and crowns, its horns gilt, and surrounded by boys and girls bearing the censer, cups, and burning incense. In the back ground, the Republicans VETUS, SORANUS, CASSIUS, &c. &c. &c.)

(Chorus of Virgins.)

I.

Mars ! vig'lant guardian of eternal Rome !
She saw thee erst in naked grandeur come,
Scorning thy dread armipotent array ;
Not by the thunder strewed,
Was thy tempestuous road,
Nor Flight, nor Terror horsed thy chariot's headlong way;

But with a subtle touch of fire,
Suggesting soft desire,
With influence sweet thy spirit stole
Into chaste Rhea's soul.

II.

Mars ! awful sire of woes, and blood, and rage !
Thou, madden'd by the Thyrsus on the stage,
Bedight in fawn-skins movest not about ;
Nor ever wildly there,
Having let flow thy hair,
Breath'st on the frantic flute till all renew the rout ;
But *thee* dire wars and deaths arouse,
Most inharmonious,
The horrid Furies leading on
Before thy crimson throne.

III.

Mars ! casting once aside thy purple state,
Prompted by passion and the will of fate,
Stoop'dst eager thou to clasp rapt Rhea's charms !
The vestal virgin laid
Beneath the myrtle shade,
Received the warlike god unknowing to her arms.
Thy image, stamped that hour on earth,
Became, by right of birth,
The founder of an empire soon
Of all beneath the moon.

NERO (*rising on his throne*).

Oh, ye assembled Rome ! Brave warriors !
Knights ! Consulars ! Robed Senators ! and ye,
Albeit Plebeians,—lords of human kind !
Vestals, meek-eyed, adown your sacred seats
Reclining, as the Priestesses of Ceres,

At the Olympic games! Oh, honour'd concourse!
 In dark inglorious shade his deedless years
 Which of us would consume? If one,—not Cæsar!
 He, be it known, that shameful lot of life
 Disdaineth; purposing the doubtful list
 To prove, opposed to Priscus. Should I fall,
 Jove's will be done! Since all in flesh arrayed
 Must be imprisoned in the mouldering urn.
 Ripeness of fame is all.

Now to the sports!

*(The Gladiators engage in the arena: after which
 NERO descends and comes forward with TIGELLINUS.)*

NERO.

I tilt with Priscus next! Thou 'lt minister,—
 Unbrace the firmness of his arm.

TIGELLINUS.

Great Cæsar!

The giant, as he had snuff'd up infancy,
 Sinks 'neath this philter. *[Exit NERO.]*

TIGELLINUS *(after a pause, looking after NERO)*.

I'll suspend thy fate,
 Lest Priscus wed Anteia, destined mine.

*(Another engagement in the Circus, to afford time to NERO
 to change his Costume.)*

*Enter the Republican HELVIDIUS PRISCUS, armed as a
 Gladiator.*

HELVIDIUS.

The emperor comes too slack of his proud vaunts,
 I'd cope with him.

TIGELLINUS.

By virtue of my office,

(PRIEST comes forward with goblet.)

I proffer thee this bowl: Now make libation!

(Hands the goblet to HELVIDIUS.)

Enter GALBA's tribune, HONORATUS.

HELVIDIUS.

To Mars!

Look! who approaches.

HONORATUS (*GALBA's Tribune*).

Tigellinus!

(*Aside to TIGELLINUS.*)

Here's health and tidings! (*Gives a letter.*)

TIGELLINUS (*turning to him*).

(*Aside.*) Both come well.

From Galba?

(*The Republican VETUS advances, and having from HELVIDIUS' hands furtively received the goblet untasted, he empties the liquid upon the earth, and then returns the goblet to the PRIEST. The Republicans HELVIDIUS and VETUS fall back upon their party.*)

GALBA's Tribune, HONORATUS (*aside to TIGELLINUS*).

Whom would you praise, but name him! Go no further!
See what the veteran Phoenix writes.

TIGELLINUS (*glancing over the letter*).

He deems

Mysterious caution hangs too thick a veil
O'er Otho's movements.

HONORATUS (*aside to TIGELLINUS*).

Galba yet to-morrow

Will enter Rome; the road being flanked by lines
Held by ambiguous Otho, whose position
Were imminent in case

TIGELLINUS (*waving him to depart*).

The Emperor.

[*Exit GALBA's Tribune, HONORATUS.*]

*Re-enter NERO, his vizor down, armed as a Gladiator.
The Laticlave, or broad stripe of purple, round the
middle of the breast.*

NERO.

Reach me a bowl of wine! Hath Priscus offered?

HELVIDIUS (*advancing*).

My next libation will be of thy blood,
Caius. Say grace, and then fall to.

(HELVIDIUS *moves apart*.)

NERO.

Great Mars!

My fellow Deity! I've work in hand
Will honour thee, my helper! Witness thou
My prize, dragged out of Priscus' heart, and aid me;
Convince the world we're not by chance of blood—
So oft I've fought, mine own is scarce left mine—
But virtue, more than mortal! (*Aside*.) Tigellinus,
Instill'd the conq'ring juice?

TIGELLINUS (*aside*).

Strong Priscus' nerves

Will prove in action weaker than the vine.

POPPEA (*aside*).

I would have warned the emperor from the lists . . .
His absence all the night—and how explain
Without betraying Otho's guilty knowledge?

NERO (*to TIGELLINUS*).

Prepare my car of triumph drawn by lions.

(NERO *joins* HELVIDIUS).TIGELLINUS (*apart*).

I'm match'd 'gainst chance and Cæsar. Drowsy trust
Seize on thy powers this day! The next, the Fates
Shall weigh thee, poised 'gainst Galba, to the beam!

[*Exit* TIGELLINUS.]POPPEA (*to JULIA, pointing in the distance*).

Lo! where yon figure strains toward the circus.

JULIA.

Nymphidius, I think.

POPPÆA (*in a voice of horror*).

Think'st thou so too ?

Released! He bears blood, death, and horror with him.
Ruin, destruction, at the utmost point !

JULIA.

What means Augusta ?

POPPÆA.

Mark me not.

My brain !

(*Aside, in great agitation.*)

What can be done ? Where can I fix ? No help ?
One chance remains ! I will anticipate him ;
Say Otho bade me warn the emperor—
Otho himself!—that's it !

(*She rises.*)

What speed Hate flies with !

(*NERO and HELVIDIUS come forward.*)

HELVIDIUS.

Upon thy brow sits tyranny to lighten
Thine eye. Against thee, Freedom ! Thræsea's spirit !
The world the prize ! and fair befall the victor !

NERO.

Then let the clarion sound, that Mars may hear
We bid a loud defiance,

and lean forward

To see fine play ! Applaud ! 'T is Cæsar strikes !

(*Flourish as they are about to engage.*)

POPPÆA (*loudly*).

My Lord ! Break off ! Your life's in danger ! Hearken !

(*They heed her not, but fight ; she stands on the step of
the throne in an action of doubt.*)

NYMPHIDIUS *rushes in.*

NYMPHIDIUS.

They are closing point to point!

I am out of durance,

Thanks to sound lungs and bribery, 't would seem
Just in the crisis.

Hold! refrain!

NERO.

Stand by!

We would refresh our laurels which are priceless,
With want of action fading.

NYMPHIDIUS.

I beseech thee!

POPPÆA (*rushes from the throne past NYMPHIDIUS down the stage*).

Gods! give me breath! Great Cæsar, hear me speak!

NERO.

Thou too?

Wert not of this globe demi-atlas

I 'd punish thee!

Our courage prove our title!

(*They are again about to engage.*)

NYMPHIDIUS.

That 's in my words that touches Cæsar's safety.

NERO (*pausing*).

By Plutus! what post next?—Say in mine ear.

POPPÆA (*interposing*).

There is a dreadful burthen, I 'd cast off.

NERO.

Who says I have not patience?

(*To NYMPHIDIUS.*)

First Augusta.

(*To HELVIDIUS.*)

Some pause, sir. (*Eagerly.*) You turn pale?

HELVIDIUS.

My transformation
Irks me, until the motive poise my shame.

NERO.

We 'll straight resume our sport. Retreat not hence.

HELVIDIUS.

Oh, hope it not !

NERO.

If he should sink meanwhile!

(NERO and POPPÆA move towards the side.)
They retire. The Republicans come forward.)

SORANUS.

When does he bleed ?

VETUS.

There 's meaning in her eye,
Which speaks in darkest characters.

HELVIDIUS.

Draw back !

We shall be else observed.

(The Republicans HELVIDIUS, VETUS, SORANUS, and
CASSIUS retire up the stage.)

(NERO and POPPÆA come forward.)

(NYMPHIDIUS approaches near.)

NERO (to POPPÆA).

I think thou 'rt mad.

POPPÆA (*breathlessly*).

I would deliver Otho's message.

NYMPHIDIUS.

Otho !

POPPÆA.

Bade me advise you ere you fought, Helvidius
Had been premonish'd not to

NERO.

Jove ! thy ways !

POPPÆA.

He sought you yesterday, when all the ports
Were closed, to advertise you.

NYMPHIDIUS (*breaking in*).

Why, 't is Otho

POPPÆA.

But so it chanced, Nymphidius

NYMPHIDIUS (*interposing*).

Who would scale

Himself the dazzling height. Conspiracy,
Rolls its dark clouds full fraught with thunder o'er us.

POPPÆA (*interrupting*).

The insolence of this base money-bag
Even makes me wild: Now is it to be borne,
An eaves-dropping delator should, like adder,
That swells with its own poison in a brake,
Eke out the sum of his discovery by
Invention of his malice?

NYMPHIDIUS.

Yester even

NERO (*to NYMPHIDIUS*).

You are forestall'd!

Fetch hither Tigellinus;

But breathe no syllable to him of this.

(*Exit NYMPHIDIUS.*)

POPPÆA.

Oh! what relief your pardoning Otho!

NERO.

Pardon?

Pardon him!

(*Aside.*) 'T is so!

POPPÆA (*in great agitation*).

No! My mind 's disturbed!

Thine eye doth burden me. It looks too deep

Into my secret soul. There 's nought to pardon.
My mind 's disturbed !—You doubt me not?

NERO.

Doubt? No!

I doubt no more!

(*Aside.*) One image wakes another
And thick they flash on me. It 'scaped his lips,
Frantic with ecstasy, Otho, when Perdition!
What roaring whirlwinds hurry off my soul?
Refrain, until I take revenge on both!
Best not to trust the air, but that I act
Do thoroughly.

Where now 's this juggling fellow?
His spider constitution shall dissolve
In its own venom.

Enter TIGELLINUS.

Oh! thou 'rt come? This way!

(*Aside to* TIGELLINUS.)
Far mightier than the mightiest foe, those drops!
They have tainted Priscus' drink?

TIGELLINUS.

As I assured you . . .

NERO.

You have not dreamt this; and th' envenomed potion
Not after all been sipp'd?

TIGELLINUS.

My life upon it!

A baby's arm, your foeman's.

NERO (*with bland and bitter emphasis*).

Most beloved

Prætor thou art! Wouldst make thyself immortal?

(*Aside.*)

Fine trap, methinks 't were for aspiring Otho,

Dark-working, and yon blind cabal !

Resolved !

(*Apart to TIGELLINUS.*)

I feel unapt *myself* for this mock combat ;

But . . I've a high design !

You know to cheat

The world with florid outside ? Hey !

(*To POPPÆA.*)

Come, puppet !

[*Exeunt NERO, POPPÆA, and TIGELLINUS.*

(*The Republicans HELVIDIUS, SORANUS, VETUS,
and CASSIUS come forward.*)

VETUS.

What was 't that Cæsar spoke ?

HELVIDIUS.

That he would straight

Be back to end our fight.

SORANUS.

Would you 'd his blood !

VETUS.

I can foretell . . .

CASSIUS (*smiling*).

Can guess.

VETUS.

I term'd it rightly.

Mortals but little know of boundless nature.

Cæsar will shun his fate !

*Enter OTHO hurriedly, cloaked from helm to heel,
followed by Officer.*

HELVIDIUS.

Who's here ?

OTHO (*to Republicans*).

My friends !

May I trespass for a word ?

HELVIDIUS (*coldly*).

What would Lord Otho ?

OTHO.

Th' unnumbered territories of the earth
Can ne'er again be subject to the rule
Of sundry grey-beards met in formal conclave.
That's past . . . among the things that have been.

HELVIDIUS.

Scoffer !

The buried genius of old Rome, her freedom,
Shall from the dust uprear his reverend head,
Roused by the shout of millions !

OTHO.

Herd, created
To bellow in the Circus ! Old Rome's freedom !
Why ! 't is a vain tradition ! Wrinkled beldams
Teach it their grandchildren, as something rare
That anciently appeared, but when, extends
Beyond their chronicle.

HELVIDIUS.

They have ears to own,
Men of the antique cast, her stirring voice.

OTHO.

Struggle not with the yoke ; but let the sway
Of Rome devolve on him who loves ye all,
Yea, freedom !

HELVIDIUS (*interrupting*).

What do you drive at ?

OTHO.

Nero's ruin !—

With this reserve, not else ; . . . ye crown me Cæsar !

HELVIDIUS.

Dar'st bear a giddy look so high, Helvidius
Weapon'd ?

Live Nero !

VETUS.

Now, alas ! if insight
Fail me not . . . (*Flourish of trumpets.*)
Ha ! at hand !

OTHO (*his hand on the arm of HELVIDIUS*).
Concede the Purple ?

HELVIDIUS.

Ne'er hope it !

OTHO.
Are ye all so bent, my lords ?

VETUS.

To a man !

OTHO.
Here 's Cæsar ! Slay him, stubborn Priscus !
(*The Republicans fall back ; OTHO retires to the
back ground.*)

*Re-enter NERO, as Gladiator, his helm down : the Laticlave
around his waist.*

(*NERO addresses himself, in dumb show, to HELVIDIUS.*)
*Re-enter POPPÆA, who, followed by her train, takes her
seat on the Throne.*

OTHO (*apart to Officer*).
While they encounter, at each entrance plant
A troop select.

OFFICER.

I am taught.

OTHO (*aside*).

My master-works
Begin to play. [*Exeunt OTHO and Officer.*]

(*NERO and HELVIDIUS come forward to engage.*)

HELVIDIUS.

Thy life ne'er showed so noble,
As offering fair Jove's sweetest morsel, vengeance !
(*They fight: the antagonist of HELVIDIUS is slain.*)
(*Commotion in the Circus.*)
(*Republicans advance.*)

HELVIDIUS.

Lo ! Tyranny lies prostrate ! Rome is free !

SORANUS.

Ye are enfranchised in his blood !

VETUS (*aside*).

False prophet,
My heart to-day ! It was not to end thus.

HELVIDIUS.

Patricians, lend your voices !

(*Populace shout.*)

Hail to Priscus !

Rome's liberator !

HELVIDIUS (*with dignity*).

There be times, when freedom
By extreme deeds must be regenerated,—
Deeds justified by ultimate necessity.
So in the Curia Julia we convene
The Senate.

POPULACE.

Priscus be Dictator ! On !—

On to the Curia !

HELVIDIUS.

Never, patriots ! more
Give to each free-born Roman righteous motive,
To trumpet in the hearing of the gods . . .
Whate'er his style . . . Dictator ! Emperor ! King ! . . .
Into whose hands they do commit on earth
Their powers . . . that HE, their delegated despot,

Is but a traitor to his kind, and dies
Justly for outraged liberty! Dictator?
No! To the Senate!

(The Populace pour forward with loud huzzas. Suddenly a violent outcry. They fall back. The Republicans aghast.)

CASSIUS.

Scattering, citizens,
Why run ye wide, all busied without view?

HELVIDIUS.

Wedge in by crossing crowds?

SORANUS.

At every gate
Spears bar our egress! Let us draw! Blood!—blood!

VETUS.

Though he had Gyges ring, the soul of Otho
Walked 'fore me visible.

POPPÆA *(sinking on her seat)*.

Tremendous hour!

(Great Tumult. Enter OTHO between two Officers, heading troops which range themselves in the back ground. OTHO and Officers advance.)

OTHO *(to the Republicans)*.

Stir not! Ye rush on death!

HELVIDIUS *(vehemently)*.

To friendship false,
As to thy country! In the sacred name
Of freedom, reeking with a tyrant's blood—
This to thy recreant heart!

(HELVIDIUS rushes with his drawn sword upon OTHO, who wards off the thrust; the Officers at the same time seize and secure HELVIDIUS from behind. The other Republicans are arrested.)

OTHO.

Oh, misled men!

Who have sped thron'd Cæsar to the realms of night,—
'T is time to crush your faction . . . bring the empire
Aid: and ye cannot with more eagerness
Attempt my life, than for Rome's peace I'd yield it.

HELVIDIUS.

Licentious Otho! Traitor, void of shame!

OTHO.

I have closed within my strengths thy practices,
Nor'll hear thee more declaim against *his* honour!
The camp rings Cæsar!

HELVIDIUS.

View yon bleeding clod,—
Nor dream all Bruti are disarmed with me!

OTHO (*to the People*).

Approve your legion's choice! a soldier, who,
Soft'ning their rigid doom, will guard the laws.

PEOPLE.

Hail, Otho, Imperator! Cæsar Otho!

HELVIDIUS.

That shout!—may it rouse the thunder that but sleeps
At Jove's right hand!

POPPÆA (*apart*).

Black, heavy drops of blood
Run down the conscious walls!

OTHO (*to the Senators*).

Ye, conscript fathers?

SENATOR.

The army's free and liberal voice the Senate
Confirms.

All hail to Otho, lord of Rome!

POPPÆA.

E'en while they speak the secret wheels are turning!

OTHO.

I embrace your loves.

POPPÆA (*starting up, and with vehemence*).

Fly rather from Rome !

The infernal snare is set ! Beseech the gods
To snatch thee from these shambles ! All the arena
But smells of carnage ; breathes a hideous steam ;
And, lo ! the spotless nymphs, the sports, the joys,
The weeping Lares vanish ! while their place
The nameless females fill, and with them . . .

OTHO.

Empress !

Retain that title still ! Not—not for empire
I suffer'd Cæsar's fall, but that his death
Might make a way unto thy sacred self.
'T was all for thee ! *for thee !*

POPPÆA (*in a voice of anguish*).

Oh ! shining ruin !

OTHO,

The gods know how I honour thee ?

POPPÆA (*vehemently*).

Then place

Myriads of leagues between us. In thine absence
Alone I'm honour'd. Hear ! while I have reason
To tell thee this. Away ! Depart ! Go hide
Thyself in caverns deep and deserts lone,
Or gloomy Thracian dale, where piny Hæmus
May wrap thee in impenetrable shade ;—
Else slay thee, Otho, for the crafty rage
Of tyranny, *the eye that's on thee now*
Will seek thee all the world o'er to destroy thee.

OTHO.

What gloomy light is't flashes on me ?

POPPÆA.

Dullard !

Thou need'st not woo thy fate. Gaze not on me,
 But *hence* ! Oh, senseless lord !—for Nero . . . Ha !
 My brain is scorch'd with flame ! . . . and from within
 Sparks all alive throws forth . . . My heart is bursting !

OTHO.

She staggers all my senses ! Dear Poppæa,
 Explain . . . explain ! (*after a pause to Officer.*)

Take up the trunk was Cæsar.

POPPÆA.

'T will be explain'd too soon. The extremity,
 Had I no tongue to speak, explains itself—
The moment comes !—the furies lash it on !—
 Ha !—*now !—*

OFFICER (*starting back from the body*).

Oh ! wondrous conduct of the gods !

OTHO.

What's that ?

OFFICER (*in amazed horror*).

My lord, this body !

(*Flourish of trumpets.*)

NERO (*without*).

Room for Cæsar !

*Enter NERO in a car, drawn by lions, from the far
 back ground of the stage with great state. Troops
 file by. NERO descends, and slowly advances, at-
 tended by NYMPHIDIUS. Great consternation in the
 Amphitheatre.*

NERO.

Thus always should conspiracy be driven
 Into its proper toil !

(*Walks up to the body : after a pause, sneeringly.*)

Unpolicied

Art thou, my double-faced Tigellinus ?

Wise of us to invest thee with our semblance!

(*Turns to HELVIDIUS.*)

What! adversary? Could not all thy valour
Redeem thy giant limbs?

HELVIDIUS.

That still thou liv'st
More galls my soul than manacles my frame.

NERO.

Fix it on immortality, thy soul,
As on the rampart's height, by Plato taught . . .
You've read the epigram of Callimachus?

(*To POPPÆA.*)

Dost droop you struck aside fate's shaft from us?

POPPÆA (*faintly*).

Your grace, I'm glad you 'scaped.

NERO.

Shone e'er such gladness

Before in any visage?

And our general . . .

Who keeps aloof, looks wondrous pleased! 'T will claim
The finest of thy arts to gloss his warning.

When sent?

POPPÆA (*trembling*).

Last eve.

NERO (*bitterly*).

Thy rare dispatch elusive
Beguiled our dazzled sight.

(*Aside.*) That stings her home.

POPPÆA (*in faltering tones*).

No minute had I, ere . . . (NERO turns away from her.)

NERO.

(*Apart to NYMPHIDIUS.*) The blue lips chatter
Of sullen Otho. Life convulsive heaves
His breast.

NYMPHIDIUS.

I doubt, he's reckoning the minutes'
Purchase his breath would fetch.

NERO (*goes up to OTHO*).

For their arrest

All thanks !

We had come off victor, yet was thine
A loyal mission.

POPPÆA (*quickly*).

I advised great Cæsar . . .

NERO (*breaking in*).

Of all thy watchful cares to interpose
'Twixt us and pale destruction.

OTHO.

Then Augusta

It was betrayed . . .

POPPÆA.

He wists not what he says.

NERO (*aside*).

From thy dark covert, Vengeance, thou arisest,
With all thy lovely snakes erect ! My heart
Is fired ! Thy charms transport me !

OTHO.

(*Fiercely and half drawing his sword.*) Caius Cæsar,
I tell thee . . .

NERO (*interrupting*).

Sir, anon.

(*Aside bitterly.*) I do not spy

Treason, nor scent abuse that's rank i' the wind !
My heart's not full of mirth ! Here's scope for tortures !
But how ?

He's compass'd with his myrmidons !

Why thus ? It is determined !

(*Aloud.*) Good friend ! Otho !

Bear these state criminals . . You've earn'd the honour .

To your own palace,—Thraseda's that was.
I'll advertise thee further.

Fly off our loves again ! All health ! Never

(*To* HELVIDIUS.) Dull valiant fool !

OTH0 (*to Officer*).

March to my palace with your prisoners.

[*Exeunt Guard with the Republicans* HELVIDIUS,
VETUS, SORANUS, and CASSIUS.

(As the Crowds disperse from the Amphitheatre.)

OTH0 (*aside*).

But for this blast, I had struck the noble quarry
Where empire tower'd in Galba ; *now* my hold
On fortune must be *through* the ambitious bald-head,
And *not* in his despite. Poppæa lured
My intents but to bewray them. Plain her will
Pointed to reign. Then scarce to blame was Nero.
She beckon'd his advances ! Oh ! false heart !

[*Exit* ОТНО.]

NERO (*who had been conferring with Nymphidius*).
The legions raised by Otho, superseded.
Thou shalt command. Be Prefect of the Camp!

NYMPHIDIUS.

Prefect? My bright fidelity!

NERO.

Be faithful!
And bright—so to thy charge. The affair cries, speed!

NYMPHIDIUS (*aside*).

Since of these justling great ones I have grown
Arbiter, Justice-like, I'll bear a balance

To weigh the bribe, to blind me; and a sword,
Which I'll put up, but in a golden scabbard.

[*Exit NYMPHIDIUS, Guard, &c. &c. NERO follows a Centurion who is making his exit, and touching his shoulder, both come forward.*]

NERO.

There is a deed will make thy life immortal,
Though brief as slime that floats adown the Tiber.

(*POPPÆA approaches and lays her hand beseechingly on the arm of NERO.*)

CENTURION.

Cæsar commands, 't is done!

POPPÆA (*aside*).

What horrors wrinkle
In wicked laughter round his eyes?

NERO.

(*Whispers the Centurion.*) Now hearken!

CENTURION (*in horrified amazement*).

Their palaces?

NERO.

Some score. The portals fasten :
Make of my foes a bonfire! In the furnace
Otho

POPPÆA (*who had gradually approached near*).

That noble? . . . Misconceive me not;
If 't is thy will, yet

NERO.

We've decreed his mansion
To illuminate, and, if both live to-morrow,
Our colleague in the consulship we'll name him.

POPPÆA (*faintly*).

My soul's touch'd sense!

NERO (*to Centurion*).

Flax, faggots, sulphur!

Place

Archers at every dazzling gap of the fabric.

So shall he seek the stars with those he guards!

Perform'd my orders, on Mæcenæ's tower

Attend at dawn.

[*Exit Centurion.*

(*Aside.*) Thus I my lightnings set

On Otho, and to the appall'd soul

Of her, the beauteous sin! his corpse prove thunder!

(*To POPPÆA.*)

Dispel with smiles the timorous cloud that hangs

On thy clear brow.

Thou new-created goddess!

Fan softer gales!

The dusk grows fast upon us.

(*Aside.*)

Oh crafty piece of nature! *She was warned!*

[*Exeunt.*

END OF ACT FOURTH.

ACT V.

SCENE I.

Towards the dawn of day. Summit of MÆCENAS' Tower.

Panoramic View of Rome.

Enter NERO and POPPÆA.

POPPÆA.

Why in this scanty raiment hast thou urged me
From thy imperial home ?

NERO (*solemnly*).

To bless thee with
A matutinal banquet of bright forms !

POPPÆA.

My brain is giddy : and my joints relax
With fear.

NERO.

Where spire of stately citadel
Wounds the thick cloud, unseen, unheard, we take
Our stand, like Jove, preparing mighty wrath
While sleeps the world.

My fury glows impatient.
Swifter ye hours !

I madden that Fate lingers.

POPPÆA.

The opening dawn ! how welcome !
(*The City appears in flames.*)

NERO (*with a savage smile*).

"T is not Phoebus
Unbinds night's latest veil, and sudden gilds
The banner on her pitchy battlements.

POPPÆA.

I swoon with fright.

NERO.

Observe! with fierce haste looms
Broader the element! Blazing roofs proclaim
The fiery storm begun. Long ominous shrieks
Prelude the wreck of Rome.

POPPÆA (*terrified*).

My senses fail!

NERO (*solemnly*).

Dost hear yon crackling flame?

POPPÆA.

I'll close my ears.

NERO (*solemnly*).

The mighty shriek of empire?

POPPÆA.

Shield me, Cæsar!

NERO (*solemnly*).

The rushing noise of fire?

Down sink the roofs
On suffocated throngs! The moon, eclipsed,
Curtained in blood, withdraws!

Dost mark?

POPPÆA.

Help, Jove!

NERO (*solemnly*).

The myriad voices piercing through the folds
Of sulphurous ruin? The universal crash?

POPPÆA.

Some vile incendiary

NERO.

BlaspHEME not, madam !
 'T is Jove's decree ! I sit, like him, 'mid gods,
 While lightnings sport beneath me !

When his heaven
 Shall topple from its base, or mingle in
 Earth's ghastly funeral pile, perchance the fame
 Of this may pass away ! But only—only
 With heaven and earth shall perish !

POPPÆA (*half fainting*).

Come from hence.

NERO (*aside*).

I feast upon her terrors !
 (*Turning to her fiercely*) Thou connived'st
 At insolent Otho's practices to rule,
 Dissembler !

POPPÆA (*timidly*).

They thought thou hadst been slain.

NERO.

He plotted not, nor you, to reign, when I
 Untimely put on deity ?

POPPÆA.

I never—

Look not so dreadfully !—said so.

NERO.

Slight as dust !
 To show the white day such a trick . . . You *thought* it ?

POPPÆA.

Trick ?

NERO.

Blush to death ! There witness my
 (*Pointing to the flames*). Revenge !

(*Unfastening his lyre.*)

Now tears the muse my soul, as fire my city,—
Seizing on all my powers! Fierce, vaunting Hector!
Oh! thou of many wounds!

Enter Centurion.

CENTURION.

My lord, convulsion!

The slaves are up!

NERO (*fiercely*).

Thy tongue rot, raven, for it!

Croak to the damned thy spirit!

(*Recognising the Centurion*) Ha! Is it thou?
And so the wierd world's altar's lit?

CENTURION.

Rome stands

Like skel'ton blasted! But your guards fall off

NERO (*fiercely*).

Revolters! Havoc! Lift the bloody scourge!

(*After a pause.*)

Those domes are levell'd?

CENTURION.

Soon! The flame, resistless,

In trailing flakes, through every breach that offers,

Mounts like a conqueror!

Enter OTHO as a Numidian slave.

POPPEA (*starting suddenly from her seat*).

Horrid light! which breaks

Wild as that reddens all the air!

CENTURION.

The smoke

Rounds every Pillar o'er Prince Otho's roof,

Portico

POPPÆA (*with energy of voice and manner*).

Emperor of soot and ashes!

His palace thou 'dst illumine! Was I made
Your vain words' mockery? Is *this* his blazon?

NERO (*aside*).

Her spleen starts wild! (*Aloud.*) Rave on, for I enjoy it!

(NERO, *replacing his lyre, turns away.*)

OTHO (*coming forward*).

(*To POPPÆA.*)

I am from thence.

POPPÆA (*to OTHO*).

By thy sad-suited aspect,

Thou hast snapp'd the thread of life?

OTHO.

My office.

POPPÆA.

Mercy!

My veins of nature cut!

NERO (*interrupting*).

Imperial matron!

I've instincts sympathize with yon rash fires,
Contagious crimson kindling through my soul!
Shun flames cannot be quenched—unless with blood.
I warned thee if o'erfond . . .

POPPÆA.

I soar above

Thy menaces, behind distraction's shield.

*Enter Tribune, who addresses himself to NERO,
who moves apart with him.*

POPPÆA (*to the Numidian slave, gaspingly*).

Tell me of Otho's palace, coped with flames?

OTHO.

Paintings and hangings. Babylonian robes
High piled up; parchments, records . . .

POPPÆA (*interrupting*).

Gods! *but Otho?*

OTHO.

Look there, and think the rest!

POPPÆA.

I cannot! Speak!

Release me from the rack! Oh, no! be dumb!

Why dost thou shake so?

OTHO.

Fair befall his urn!

POPPÆA.

Not closed in death those eyes?

I'll search . . . the truth

'Mid burning rafters!

(*POPPÆA rushes to the extremity of the stage, and leans over the Parapet.*)

(*NERO and Tribune come forward.*)

(*Centurion waits upon POPPÆA, followed by OTHO.*)

NERO (*to Tribune*).

Rage the noise-driven rogues?

TRIBUNE.

As with one voice

NERO.

I would they had one neck!

My expiation asks a hecatomb.

With winged haste to the Prefect of the Camp,

Nymphidius! Tell him I exact his service:

Which is, forthwith to march his army hither.

[*Exit Tribune.*

(*Tumult without: loud shouts.*)

NERO.

To breathe's a toil! My soul is dark! I'd reach
Olympus; but, as moved at my approach,
Hell's princes flock around!

(Loud shouts.)

(Centurion starts, and hurriedly re-approaches.)

How now? What mean you?
Despair is in thine eyes! Death on thy cheek!

CENTURION.

Destruction hovers! Round Mæcenus' tower,
The mob, down-trampling

NERO.

Dash them in the flames!

Cæsar's undone!

The gods!—'T is they conspire
'Gainst me in envy. Horrors all at once
Start up, and stare on me!

(To Centurion.)

Quick, bid the seers
Consult their babbling birds, their groaning oaks,
Their beasts' sage entrails.—Fly!

[Exit Centurion.]

Enter the Republican HELVIDIUS, hastily.

HELVIDIUS.

Thou scourge to Rome!

NERO (*tremblingly*).

We're glad thou art unscathed . . Our orders, Priscus.

HELVIDIUS.

Hark to those voices climbing through the storm!
Above, below! . . From every mangled corpse
A spirit, with a half-drawn dagger, starts.
Shudder, thou slayer!—The dead are risen to judgment!

NERO (*aside, in a voice of horror*).

With burning torches, and the whips of furies! . . .

HELVIDIUS.

I'd take thy life, but by the senate's sentence
'T were best.

Ay, tremble!

[*Exit* HELVIDIUS.]

NERO.

How 'scaped he the flames?
Ere this Nymphidius' legions . . .

Re-enter Tribune.

Your report?

TRIBUNE.

Nymphidius will not move.

NERO.

What say'st thou?—Speak
Again!

Our Prefect stand aloof, when we . . .
Blood and ashes!
Doubts he our full supremacy?

TRIBUNE.

He says,
He has work more urgent.

NERO.

Than our need, whose pressure
Should from the bidding of the gods reclaim him?
What work?

TRIBUNE.

To watch Lord Galba. (NERO starts.)
O'er the void
Of Rome his eagle's flag, nor yet believe
Their easy triumph.

NERO.

Hell and earth!—My ears
Take in your words, but not their sense.—
Whose eagles
Flag over Rome?

TRIBUNE.
Why, Servius Galba's!

NERO (*with a half-shriek*).

Galba!

Hearing is blasted.—I am pierced through and through!

TRIBUNE.
His horse are entering the city gates.
(*NERO stands aghast.*)

NERO (*after a pause, suddenly*).
Slave! Thou hast lived too long!

Take death for death!
(*NERO draws his sword, and rushing at, wounds the Tribune.*)

Hence, with thy blood!—Begone!

[*Exit Tribune.*]

Was Tigellinus
A liar?—No—One lie!—Nymphidius' heart-strings
Are Plutus' purse-strings! All the hollow world,
Like a corrupted slave, beguiles its master.
My very senses mutiny, for Rome
Begins to quake, afraid to bear me up,
And bids me tread no more her pavements.—

Galba!

Re-enter Centurion, with Priests, Augurs, and divers others.

(*Presenting his sword.*)
Stand off! Away!—'Tis idle incense here . . .
Unless to hell!

I must have miracles;—
Plant light, life durable upon my head!

1ST PRIEST.
The hour doth teem with portents.

NERO (*fiercely*).

Sun and moon!

Portents? (*In slow, hollow accents of despair.*)

That Galba's here is more than all!

PRIEST.

The senate now pronounce a dreadful judgment.

NERO (*violently*).

Loose the wild beasts to scare their councils! Flames!

Point 'gainst their bald heads your inverted spires!

(*After a pause, throwing away his sword.*)

Jove is affronted with me!—Sacrifice!

Well, speak your knowledge.

1ST PRIEST.

As the sword was raised,

It thundered on our right; whereat . . .

NERO (*breaking in fiercely*).

The blade

Ye left unstained, ye sanctified deceits!

I am the mock of fools, that should myself

By right be offered unto.

Partial Jove!

Galba is old, like thee!

Come, saving health!

Stored against this extremity (*Produces a phial.*) and speed

Colossick Cæsar, where the Olympian throng . . .

I am sick . . . at heart . . . (*About to drink, he stops short.*)

What need of such great haste?

Are the dark chambers of the tomb so pleasing,

That I must rush alone?

Poppæa? If

Her delicate ghost were sent to wait my coming,

Then would our gay train draw Tartarian crowds

To feed on her white breast their cold blank eyes.

So Julius and Augustus shall want troops,

And all the haunt be ours!

(*POPPÆA comes forward, avoiding OTHO, who follows.*)

POPPÆA (*to herself*).

No stranger eye
Shall peer into these mighty realms of woe,
To see their vastness.

If thou vauntedst true . . .
Had I been so o'erfond . . .

The greater guilt
To ruin a noble heart; and to desert thee
It was not natural!

NERO.

Oh, terribly fair!
Fate has been sowing whirlwinds.—Storm incarnate
Of cloud and fire! Dissolve, and shun collision!
(*In an awful tone to POPPÆA.*)
Hast thou no dread?

POPPÆA.

Of thee?—Thou mock'st me!—No!
(*Clamour and shouting without.*)

CENTURION.

They force the outer gate.

POPPÆA.

Some god doth kindle
The avenging spirit!
Say he cast me off,
For Africa!—he!—Otho!—Bitter lie!
Uncandied over, save to ravenous mood
Of fond precipitous woman in her anger.

NERO (*aside*).

Dispel a new-risen doubt.
(*Aloud.*) What prompted thee
To interpose when equally encountering
Priscus? . . .

POPPÆA.

Not care for thee. My apprehension
Forewent Nymphidius' errand, unto Otho
Fatal, unless, *in his name*, I forestall'd it.

OTHO (*aside*).

Hold heart thy transports !

(*OTHO retires up the stage—rush of populace—exeunt
priests, &c. &c.*)

CENTURION.

Linger, you are lost !

POPPÆA (*with violent gesture*).

Shame upon tears and sighs !—I would my voice,
To vengeance tuned, could echo all the way
'Twixt earth and Acheron ; and rouse Alecto
To blast his fell destroyer !

NERO (*threateningly*).

Hence with me !

POPPÆA.

Never ! until the firmament come down,
I, drooping, hang my head o'er Otho's grave.

NERO (*raising the phial*).

My fingers quiver, tortured by some demon,
They would dislodge . . . thy fate !

POPPÆA.

Disturb me not,

But leave my woes alone.

NERO (*seizing her by the wrist*).

With death, thou Ulcer !
You drain this off, or fly with me ! . . . that ends it !

POPPÆA (*eagerly taking the phial*).

Welcome omnipotent draught !—(*She drinks.*)

(*Loud shouts.*)

Now then avoid me !

NERO.

We meet in Tart'rus !

[Exeunt NERO and CENTURION hurriedly.]

Enter populace and soldiers, who with loud exclamations cross the stage after him.

(Manent POPPÆA and OTHO.)

OTHO *(throwing off his disguise)*.

Horror ! My betrothed !

This sudden paleness ? What hast done ? Thou hold'st
That phial ? Gods ! Malicious fate ! Oh fortune !

POPPÆA.

And art thou come from bliss to welcome me,
On death's dim verge ? Then, chaste as spirits' joys,
Fold thy wings o'er me !

OTHO.

Innocent Poppæa !

The firm earth bears us.

POPPÆA.

Let me catch thy breath !—

'T is no illusion !—Let me . . . Let me touch !—

And gaze !—My eyes and every sense acknowledge
That . . . Hold me, or I sink

OTHO.

Poppæa dying ?

POPPÆA.

That 's to rest quiet with the shades below ;
'Mongst whom Ah, I shall miss thee !

OTHO.

I would make me

Over to Orcus raving, were there not
A deed demands a sober fury in me.
The ruining fire wraps the fabric round.
Come this way.

POPPÆA.

Let me lean upon your arm.

OTHO.

There 's succour yet. Bear up for my sake. Come!

POPPÆA.

My soul is parting!

OTHO (*mournfully, aside*).

Cæsar's lust-burnt veins,

Oh, were they set a bleeding! Loathly wretch!

[*Exit OTHO bearing POPPÆA in his arms.*]

SCENE II.

A street in Rome—shouts and tumult.

Enter the Republicans HELVIDIUS, VETUS, SORANUS, CASSIUS, and ANTEIA.

HELVIDIUS.

They shout a triumph! Galba's sudden onslaught
Is ruin!

Posterity shall sooner gather
My ashes from the gemonies than urn
Within that capital a Cæsar governs.

VETUS.

I knew it, for I found the times deceased
Teem'd with rank germins,—whence I pierced the future.
I shall quit Rome.

HELVIDIUS.

Where freedom falls her head,
Grieving that hireling warriors' steel-clad hoofs
Tread out her holy fires.

VETUS.

The people's voice
Who trust in, bid wild winds blow constant !

ANTEIA (*to* HELVIDIUS).

Whither

Thou goest, I travail with thee.

HELVIDIUS.

Nay, remain,

Nor leave friends, kindred.

'T is, with me, as sunset ;

My fate projects too deep a shade.

ANTEIA.

When lately,

By secret stair ascending, known to me
From childhood, to my father Thrasea's hall
I sped, and stood amongst ye,—ye, and Otho—
Did I bid *thee* remain ? No ! by the hand,
Through light intense I led thee.

So will cling

Throughout the flaming world, 'mid storms and battles,
Such as thou tak'st delight in ; and should ever
My eye discern the sword of tyranny
Uplifted o'er thee, then, though in my chains,
I will so rush upon thy foe, and dash
Them round him thus, to save thee o'er again !

(*She springs into his arms.*)

HELVIDIUS.

Shalt have thy way ! Self-exiled, friends, lets forth
Bearing our scanty pittance of bleak freedom
Where safety sleeps upon the unguarded Alps.
A little while, beyond the eternal tomb,

All tyranny's o'erpast.

Then come my Anteia !

The devious steps of destiny explore ;

One star to guide us . . . Petus Thræsea's spirit !

[*Exit the Republicans.*]

SCENE III.

Outskirts of Rome.—Distant shouts and tumult.

Enter NERO in tattered garments, his lyre hanging from his shoulders.

NERO.

Still rings the cry of terror and pursuit ;

Still my ears tingle, and my eyeballs strain ;

My hairs like icicles erect ; my lips

Run o'er with foam ; and yet there's none to end me :

" My friends desert, I cannot find a foe."

Oh ! that my dream would cease, and I uprise,

As on the morn from natural human sleep,

With power in this right hand, and spear and sceptre.

Horrible dream ! From gory earth Bellona

Shrieks to all quarters of pale heaven. Beyond

The enormous swell of whose wild roar, I view

Romans, as multitudinous as waves,

Rolling away, and . . . 'gulf them ! Who can stem

The tide ? How Galba storms ! Now, what the fire

Spared, may his arm exterminate ! I would,

With Nero's ruin, or ere eternal night

Closed my wan eyes, oblivion's burning wheel
Might scour this field of life !

That Moor !

Enter OTHO, disguised.

OTHO (*aside*).

(*To NERO.*) The monster !
Galba's proclaim'd ;—thyself condemn'd to death.

NERO.

What I, the lord of life, to be cut off
From sunshine ? This hour Cæsar, and the next,—
My whole shrunk reach of empire to be grasped
Thus ! *thus* !—I nothing !—Shuddering soul ! . . .
Didst name

What death ?

OTHO.

Thy head 'tween stakes, and naked, under
The licitor's rod.

NERO (*stands aghast, after a pause*).

Terrific thought ! In vain
My soul recoils from the abysm !

There !

The bickering forms of father, wife, stalk forth !
And see ! that phantom with the horrible glare
That stretches out its hand ! It is *her* Fury
From whose fond breast I drew my life.

Wouldst lead

Through the sick air to faithless hell, while groans
Ring like a death-peal through me ? Now I falter
Upon the whirlpool ! Down, ye ghastly shapes !
Touch me not ! Touch me not !

(*He clasps his hands tightly over his head, bending
almost to the ground.*)

During NERO's stupor, enter HONORATUS, GALBA'S Tribune.

HONORATUS (*to NERO*).

Thou 'rt found !

OTHO (*interposing and discovering himself*).

The fiends,

So scream in's frightened ear, he is wrapt in horror !

HONORATUS (*producing scroll*).

But Galba, gracious as the gods, here proffers

Rule over Egypt. In his depth of ruin

Right noble terms !

With which I will start the blood

Into his chalked front . . (*To NERO, touching him.*) My lord !

NERO (*lost in imaginary terrors*).

Your eyeballs

Roll in their blood ! Unclasp my hand !

OTHO (*interposing and taking the paper*).

Trust me with't !

And bear my greetings to the Emperor Galba,

On whose demise I reign.

HONORATUS.

May he live for ever !

The maj'sty of the world !

He's close at hand ;

Let Rome kneel down and wonder !

[*Exit HONORATUS.*

(*OTHO resumes his disguise.*)

OTHO (*to NERO*).

Cæsar ! look

Full-sighted in death's face, as fits the son

Of Claudius !

NERO (*abstracted*).

Sick ! a feather tinged with poison

Search'd the old dotard's swallow.

OTHO.

Meet thine end.

By one brave deed like Agrippina's offspring !

NERO.

Rest innocent blood ! What scene hast conjured ? Hear
How my pale mother pleads for mercy ! Hold !
“ Plunge in my womb your swords ! ” she cries, and tears
Her hairs, and calls them pitiless sons ! Oh ! cast not
Such fearful looks on me, as if my breath
Venom'd thy airy substance ! Nemesis
Makes guilty whom she lists, then how can I
Resist her opposeless might ? 'Tis state defence.
Yet I'll not shock thy soul before the time ;
Enough, that this must be !

I know you think
I gave the order : Spare her slaves !

OTH.

My lord !

NERO.

Bare not thy breast to me ! Stream not so fast
Those founts where I . . . Is she not beautiful ?
'T was death enamoured of her matron charms,
Not I !—*Not I !* . . . “ Plunge in my womb your swords ! ”

OTH.

Galba is nigh ! Arouse thee !

NERO.

Say, that I
In mourning garb appeal

OTH.

They'll hoist thee up !

NERO.

“ My wife, my father, mother, doom me dead ! ”

(Loud shouts : NERO groans).

OTH.

Is that a thing so wretched ?

NERO.

Is it *not* ?

Horror ! a little while and then we are not,

Or are not *here*. How's that? If death hath little
In it, "despatch thyself; and teach the way."

OTHO.

Thou ill-instructed, who on man's last pangs
To shine in Hercules pored?

NERO.

Then doubly armed . . .

(Draws two daggers.)

(His lyre falls to the ground. Gazing intently on the lyre.)

"What a musician passes from the world!"

(POPPÆA totters in from the back unperceived.)

(Loud shouts of NERO! NERO starts.)

NERO *(after vainly essaying to stab himself.)*

"Not yet the fatal moment's come." Talk calmly!

OTHO.

Reluctant faintness! Wash it thence with blood.
Rest still!—immortal while I make thee.

NERO *(to himself)*.

Courage

Cæsar!

OTHO.

Thy hand unlocks itself.

NERO *(shuddering)*.

'T is venom'd!

(NERO drops the one dagger, which POPPÆA, having with feeble steps neared the spot, with difficulty takes up.)

I'll live! Oh, hide me in some dungeon! Send me
To wander on some pathless shore! Let shame
And hooting infamy pursue—but life!

OTHO.

Would'st cling, like reptiles, to the verge of being?

(Aiding the thrust of the other dagger.)

Faint coward! Then thus!

(NERO recedes, apprehensive of the blow.)

NERO.

Insufferable traitor!

To every inch of flesh I'll harrow thee;
Invent such pangs!

OTHO.

Look well on me—would'st tortures.

(OTHO throws off his disguise.)

NERO.

My brain is stung by hornets! Ah! *whose eyes'*
Majestic menace? . . . Mercy! Otho living!

OTHO.

Who had died for *thee*, who empire spurn'd, and stood
And stemm'd the stream that roared against your throne.
Whom yet thou doom'd'st to perish, having forced
His destined bride, all trembling, breathless, faint,
Prostrate in anguish, tearing up the earth,—
To wed thee!

Wherefore ere to primitive flame

Thou sink'st, first shivering gaze;

(He produces and holds up the scroll.)

Lord Galba's rescript

That Nero govern Egypt

NERO.

Stifle thee quick with burning rain! Let Heaven
Unclasp itself!

I'm Caius Cæsar still!

OTHO.

Soars thy vain soul upon that air-blown thought?
Thus—*thus* I burst it!

Enter Nymphidius with Prætorian Guard.

(OTHO wrests the dagger from the hand of NERO, and is about to stab him, when the blow is averted by himself being seized upon from behind, and disarmed.)

OTHO.

Gods! *Nymphidius!*NYMPHIDIUS (*apart*).

Galba shall rue his spurning my demand
Of thirty thousand sesterces gratuity
To each Prætorian guard!

(NYMPHIDIUS *kneels to NERO*.)

Great emperor! Pardon!

NERO (*reproachfully*).*This* your fidelity, Prefect of the *Mines*?

NYMPHIDIUS.

I hold at thy dispose my sword and legions,—
Outnumbering Galba's.

Speak! We turn his flank—
Scatter his power like chaff!

NERO (*breathlessly*).

The vassal universe

Mine again?

NYMPHIDIUS.

Yea, and all its store unfolds
Of treasure! Mighty as your cause you are!

NERO (*with a scream of triumphant exultation*).

Whirl slings! Rain lances! Give them steel in the teeth!
And I do yet survive to torture Otho!

POPPEA (*from behind*).

The gaping Furies, eldest-born of hell!
Teach dream of tortures!

(POPPEA *totters towards NERO: aims a feeble blow:*
her arm is arrested by NYMPHIDIUS: she falls.)

NERO.

Murdered! Envious gods!

NYMPHIDIUS.

A scratch, my lord. No strength was hers to thrust!

NERO.

Inevitable death ! I had anointed
The dagger's point with poison !

(*Sinking down.*) Mangled shades !

Ye drag me where from oozing Erebus
Uprises yonder gladiator ! Why
Comes he to meet me from his arched domain ?
His bony gums drop gout of blood ! I tread
On ashes !

Sick !—my soul is scared with horror !

OTHO.

I'll answer for those sesterces, Nymphidius.

NYMPHIDIUS.

Each, forty thousand ?

OTHO (*impatently*).

What you will !

NYMPHIDIUS.

Be free !

Pecunia's disk 's reversed ! I'll not let slip
This wafture of her hand.

(*OTHO released, rushes to POPPÆA, and hangs over her.*)

OTHO.

Thou wast more easy

When—Strain thine eyes with death-mixed tenderness ?

POPPÆA.

Missing thee, I woke, and falter'd on, until
My hair, loose-streaming, singed with flame ; and limbs
Failed through the horror's drear.

I fold an arm

Round thy blest neck, and, with the other, point
Where Jove holds sway, whose massy gate hangs low,
To be ope'd kneeling.

(*She kneels.*)

OTHO.

World, thou 'rt dark'ning to me !

POPPÆA.

I feel my earthly nature, like a lark
Let loose to heaven, up to spirit working.
Are they not terrible, the gods? Remorse
For some impossible enormous sin
Sinks on my soul! and . . .

Hark! I'm calm. Soft music!

My eyes are filled with tears. Oh! thou Omniscient,
And heaven can understand what means this whisper!
Speak to me, for I know thee.

Kiss me, Marcus!

And shut up all my senses!

(POPPÆA dies.)

OTHO (*hanging over her*).

Livid lips!

She's melted from my love! Her relics lie
Prisoners to silence. Yes, I'll kiss thee, sweet
After death's marble touch.—Here lay my head!
Oh, look that none disturb us!

(OTHO sinks down, tranced in grief.)

(NERO, gazing with horror on POPPÆA.)

NERO.

Augusta beckons me!
And sounds the mortal summons, bringing with her
The Hags with crawling hair. Hide me! Hide me!
Their flashing brands they let drive full at me,
And shake their iron whips! She all the while
Sets them upon me! grins a horrid smile!
My eyes rain blood.

I will not go with thee!

NYMPHIDIUS.

Minos, thou dread unbrib'd! take . . Hark!

(*Flourish of trumpets.*)

The triumph!

NERO (*springing from the ground*).

Avaunt! Think not, I'll perish!

(*With awful demoniac solemnity.*) Piteous shapes
Of unavailing horrors! fruitless crimes!
That, from the realms of night, enlarg'd, assemble,
To o'er-inform recoiling Cæsar's soul,
In lieu of penitence, now hear his voice
Speak to the depths of chaos.

O'er creation

Drive, final ruin, thy ploughshare! and disjoin
The beldam earth's foundations!

Phantasm gaunt!

Jove of the unrefunding grave! Oh, screen me
From the reliefless rage of unfelt curses!
As thy grim populous pomp I join, uplift
For one illimitable sweep thy scythe,
And whirl mankind to Tartarus!

(NERO dies.)

Enter musicians of various kinds singing and playing triumphal songs; after them, oxen to be sacrificed, having their horns gilt, and their heads adorned with fillets and garlands; then, in carriages, golden crowns, and gifts of tributary states. Next come the Lictors, having their faces wreathed with laurel, surrounded by a great company of musicians and dancers, dressed like satyrs, and wearing crowns of gold. Immediately follow a long train of persons carrying perfumes.

Then enter GALBA, dressed in purple, embroidered with gold, a crown of laurel on his head, a branch of laurel in his right hand, and in his left an ivory sceptre, with an eagle on the top. A golden ball hangs from his neck on his breast. He stands in a gilded chariot, adorned with ivory, and drawn by four white horses. He is attended by HONORATUS and a great

crowd of citizens, all in white. Military Tribunes on horseback by his side. The Consuls and Senators on foot. NYMPHIDIUS bends a knee before the chariot of GALBA, and points to the body of NERO.

GALBA exclaims :—Oh ! an immortal thing !

He descends ; and having raised OTHO, motions that he should mount the chariot with him. But OTHO mournfully shakes his head, and casts himself on the earth beside POPPÆA. GALBA, amidst loud cries and shouts of “Io triumphe,” re-ascends the chariot.

HONORATUS.

All hail to Servius Galba ! God on earth !

The Curtain Falls.

FORGERY.
A DOMESTIC TRAGEDY,
In Five Acts.

RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED
TO
THE AUTHOR OF "PELHAM."

VOL. I.

I

Characters.

EARL BRIDGETON

LORD FINMORE *His Son.*

ELRINGTON

BELOE *A Banker.*

NOEL ATHERLY *A Poor Author.*

HARDFIST *A Jeweller.*

NATHAN *A Lapidary.*

USHER

JAILOR

GRIMLOCK

LADY CLARISSA POMPAS *Daughter of Earl Bridgeton.*

MRS. ATHERLY *Noel's Mother.*

EVA ELRINGTON *Daughter of Elrington.*

ANNA

SCENE *London.*

TIME *The Reign of George I.*

FORGERY.



ACT I.

SCENE I.

Apartment in the Mansion of EARL BRIDGETON, *at*
Whitehall.

EARL BRIDGETON *and* LADY CLARISSA POMPAS.

THE EARL.

Now, noble daughter, and my honour ever!
Thy drench'd weeds changed, we'll thank you to inform us
How you became immers'd, and who preserved you?

LADY CLARISSA.

Being called from Lambeth, vexed by an occurrence—
But I propose ere dark to join again
Miss Elrington, dear schoolmate!—Sister mine
To-morrow.—In our pleasure-bark I sailed,
Which, lightly timbered, when the gusty wind
(Horridly human!) its own opposite,
Grew o' the sudden, and surprised our sails,
Was overset. The page and waterman
Swam for their safety. Then my lamp of life
The stifling element had surely quenched,

But that a stranger, from a galley near,
Plunged in the stream, and caught me as I sank.
His arms assiduous, my weight sustained
Until he reached the shore. To have seen the grave
Timid reserve with which he assisted me
Into a vehicle!

THE EARL.

And what's his title?

LADY CLARISSA.

I earnestly inquired his name in vain.

EARL.

Which argues 't is unknown, nor to be uttered
By noble lips. Our further honour still!
Of him no more, Lady Clarissa Pompas!

LADY CLARISSA (*aside*).

A weight is on my tongue; but ah! for ever
Here will his image sit enshrined!

EARL.

And what

Brings you to town?

LADY CLARISSA.

A painful business.

(*Pauses.*)

A short while since, my lord, I penn'd an essay,
Critical, on poetry, the which I published.

(*Again pauses.*)

EARL.

I am 'ware of some such folly.

LADY CLARISSA.

There's an author

Whose fine imaginings struck on my heart
Deeply and strangely, and stole forth my spirit;
His verse wants polish, and—I know not wherefore,
Despite myself—I sneered at his pretensions.

Atherly the poet's name. I found appended
To my critique, a note reflecting on
His father's life, and . .

EARL (*interrupting*).

From a chance inspection
Of your work, passing through the press, I seized
The occasion ; to my further honour still !

LADY CLARISSA.

Was 't you, my lord ? For shame ! Oh, who will credit,
The title which sets forth, a female pen
Could indite such malice ? I 'll burn every copy.

EARL.

Malice ?—the story 's famous. I 't was tried him ;
My honour still !—knew all the circumstances.
This Noel Atherly's father broke from prison,
Just as I stated, a convicted felon !

LADY CLARISSA,

That I had known as much before I drew
Censorial eyes upon him. Cruel libel !

EARL.

Cast not a thought so low, my lady daughter.
I abhor when mean-born men of letters vaunt it
Over high birth, advance their little fate
So far above their level to reflect,
In strength of vain acquirements, upon rank
Centuried in mankind's awe—and hence, young Noel,
Bred up in poverty and straits at home,
I 'd teach his place. Experience makes us wise.

LADY CLARISSA (*looking through the window*).

Excuse me : here 's my brother, hot from Lambeth !

EARL.

Hot overmuch ! all touchwood ! I have witnessed
As he takes fire, his reason on her throne

Topple, as mine, when William Nassau reigned,
But well-experienced age . . . well—so . . .

This match

With Eva Elrington,—his heady will
Rules it against my wisdom.

LADY CLARISSA.

Nay, my lord,
She is most sweetly disposition'd. Peace
And love dwell in her.

EARL.

So he will break her heart.

Go to. Experience makes us wise. Her father,
It irks me his seclusion.

Be he infirm,
Why keep his privacy inviolate
As death to time? You've seen him, child, but once;
I have had *no* access. Solitude dwells round him.
Before he arrived from Lisbon, in the spring,
With ample evidence of being a man
Of family, he had stored in Beloe's bank
A princely fortune.

LADY CLARISSA.

Of his high descent
We learned from Eva . . .

EARL.

Ay: there's noble blood
In the man's veins. That thought inclined me yield
A cold assent. Did any soil of trade
Stick to him, though he trebled his child's dower,
Vast as it is, a son of mine would scorn
The alliance. To our further honour still!
That, by the way. I expect a clerk from Beloe,
The banker, with . . . My son!

Enter LORD FINMORE.

LORD FINMORE (*harshly*).

Fair lady sister,
Away from Lambeth! what dost mean? Why here?

LADY CLARISSA.

My lord, you question too . . .

LORD FINMORE.

Be dumb, frail thing!

I hate when women answer!

LADY CLARISSA.

'Las, your bride!

LORD FINMORE.

Pity yourself! Not her! compared to whom
The soft creations, choicest of your sex,
Are but swarth clay, whereon Dame Nature first
Essayed her skill, to perfect Eva's beauties.
But why, I ask, art here at such a time?

LADY CLARISSA.

Oh, fruitless errand! I hie back to Lambeth.
Forthwith.

(*Aside.*) All is not well within.

(*To EARL BRIDGETON.*) My lord,
You attend these nuptials?

EARL.

To my further honour!

LADY CLARISSA (*to the EARL*).

I'll have that work suppress'd.

Farewell!

(*Aside.*) Heigh ho!

How my heart aches! I think too much of him
Who saved me. We may never meet again!

[*Exit LADY CLARISSA.*]

EARL (*in admiration of the grace of her gesture*).

Grand carriage! To my further honour still!

Troth, my Lord Finmore, your brusque 'haviour
To Lady Clarissa Pompas . . let me tell you,
These hairs are wise, and my experience bids me
Remark—to your noble sister . . nay, to all . .
Excuse me!

LORD FINMORE (*snappishly interrupting*).

I will not. (*Turns away.*)

Now I am wrapped

In ripe expectancy of what the morrow . . .

Enter Servant ushering NOEL ATHERLY.

(LORD FINMORE *in his abstraction moves against NOEL.*)

LORD FINMORE (*starting, haughtily*).

How now! what creature's this?

NOEL.

Sir! creature?

LORD FINMORE (*impatiently*).

Scare-crow!

Stand aside! hear you! I am the Lord Finmore!

SERVANT (*to EARL BRIDGETON*).

My lord, a person from the bank of Beloe.

LORD FINMORE.

S'death, clerk, keep aloof!

(LORD FINMORE *waves NOEL off affrontingly.*)

EARL BRIDGETON.

Young man, from Beloe?

NOEL.

I must protest, although I cannot number
Uncertain fortune's favours like Lord Finmore,
Nor clothe my thoughts in such an abject phrase
But they'll appear above my low condition,
Against this usage, nor were I a man,
Tamely to endure that.

LORD FINMORE.

Who is't stirs? Who prates?
Who wags his tongue here to disturb my transports,
I'll pash him into dust. Dull slave, stand by!

NOEL.

He is more a slave than poverty makes me
Presumes upon it.

EARL (*to* LORD FINMORE).

This unseemly spleen
At every soul and word—'t is my advice,
You curb it. Let your torrent rage ebb out,
To our further honour still.

LORD FINMORE.

Are you too leagued
To jar my soul when foraging for joy?

(*Starts off to the end of the stage.*)

EARL BRIDGETON.

Your message?

NOEL.

To apprise you, good, my lord,
We have transferr'd from Mr. Elrington,
By his direction, to your lordship's order
The hundred thousand pounds which——

Enter Attendant.

ATTENDANT.

Please, my lord,
Hardfist the jeweller is urgent you'd admit him
To just five minutes' speech upon a matter
Of instant import to your lordship.

EARL.

Import
To me! I'll see him. Though we are old or so,
We have nous.

(*To* NOEL.) You'll please to wait my leisure.

[*Exeunt* EARL and Attendant.]

NOEL (*apart*).

Hardfist?

Who through my agency the diamond bought
Of Elrington? (*He retires up the stage, and occupies himself with a book that lies upon a far table.*)

Enter BELOE.

BELOE.

My lord, how fare you?

LORD FINMORE.

Beloe?

What can have drawn you from your radiant skies,
To combat this cold region?

(*They shake hands.*)

BELOE.

To divert.

Painful suspense I have loitered much abroad,
And eyed the beating of the Atlantic wave
To waste my irksome leisure,—but at Lisbon,
The mystery in which is wrapped the fate,
The life of one I've known for years, induced me
Return to England.

LORD FINMORE.

Speak you not of Plumworth,
Who one fine day not long ago was lost?

BELOE.

Murdered, the rumour runs. His books of trade
Have disappeared, and with them every dollar.
Impelled by doubts lest he may not have made
A voyage to England, I'd set engines working
To arrive at certainty.

LORD FINMORE.

With that same merchant
I had to hold a lengthened correspondence

Ere my proposals for my Eva's hand
Could reach her father.

BELOE (*in evident agitation*).

Sir, whose hand dost mean?
Not . . not Miss Elrington's?

LORD FINMORE.

What! knew you not
That, linked in Hymen's silken bands, to-morrow
She is Lady Finmore?

(BELOE *staggers back from the spot where he stands.*
After a pause.)

BELOE (*aside*).

Fail not, springs of life!
And heart be firm for pride sake!

LORD FINMORE.

You turn pale
As any corpse.

BELOE.

Do I?
(*Aside.*) I will be calm.

LORD FINMORE.

Beg pardon: I forgot that heretofore
Some passages of courtship passed betwixt
The lady and thyself.

BELOE.

My lord, to oblige
Old Plumworth, on her landing, I received
Miss Elrington, and placed her at a school
At Richmond.

LORD FINMORE.

Where my sister afterwards
Happening to board, we met.

You know her father?
Who, with your firm, I am told, hath lodged vast sums
For years?

BELOE.

I never saw him. Elrington
Transacted business through our travelling clerk,
Ledger, who died last week, and whose department
One Noel Atherly since

LORD FINMORE.

Notorious varlet!

BELOE.

What! Atherly?

(NOEL, catching his name mentioned, grows attentive, and
discovers symptoms of agitation.)

LORD FINMORE (*sneeringly*).

The man's a versifier!—

A sentimental sonneteer! Albeit
A lady, learned, who shall be nameless, laughs
To scorn, in printed book, the scribbler's claims!

BELOE.

I knew not this.

(*Aside.*) How hard, indifference,
To put thy semblance on, when my sad heart,
Like stricken deer, weeps blood!

LORD FINMORE.

But have an eye

To that fine clerk aforesaid. He may forge
More marketable lines than doggrel verse.
According to our essayist, his father,
After having been convicted

NOEL.

Gracious heavens!

(NOEL, whom the preceding discourse had manifestly
worked up to a state of great excitement, with a violent
start upsets the table.)

LORD FINMORE (*looking round*).

I forgot that vulgar person. Heed him not!—

'T is thirty years since Atherly, the felon,
The father of your scribe, broke out of prison.

(NOEL in a violent transport, rushes across the stage,
and exit.)

(LORD FINMORE and BELOE, amazed and startled, look
round, and follow him with their eyes.)

LORD FINMORE.

Insolent dog! Is he mad?

BELOE.

My lord, the man

We have in question.

LORD FINMORE.

Noel Atherly?

Re-enter EARL BRIDGETON.

EARL.

Is he gone? How happens that?

Who waits without?

Enter Attendant.

(LORD FINMORE and BELOE walk apart: EARL
BRIDGETON addresses the Attendant.)

EARL.

Be quick in 't, to our further honour still!

ATTENDANT.

At Mrs. Atherly's?

EARL.

I have said: and bid him
Hie hither instantly. — Your lord commands it.

[*Exit Attendant.*

What, Beloe! — When did you arrive?

BELOE.

Last night.

I have made it my first pleasure to . . .

EARL (*interrupting*).

I thank you.

Hale as these hairs are wise.

(*They shake hands.*)

Gad, sir!—your presence

Is timely. Hardfist waits us to our honour

And he reports, that Atherly, your clerk——

But you shall hear; and it concerns you, Finmore,
To join in council. We have spoke.

LORD FINMORE.

You put me

Quite from my patience.

EARL.

And so close a practice!

We'll dash his drifts—we'll put him to his shifts!
To our further honour still!

LORD FINMORE.

You speak in clouds;

And I, thank God, have not that illness in me,
To expound enigmas.

EARL.

But I have reasons, look ye,

Most excellent reasons—Soft! I just have heard——

LORD FINMORE.

Excuse me, Beloe. Abstruse, lord, your servant.

EARL.

What must postpone . . your ear . . what may for ever
Cross you in your intentions.

[*Exit* LORD FINMORE.]

Out of hearing!

When I was twenty old, just such a humour
Had I, but age hath made us wise. That time
We dreamt not of the coronet; Earl Bridgeton
At least ten kinsmen off, with sons alive.

We practised at the bar, and Sergeant Pompas,
Whene'er he spoke, drew much applause ; but now
We search the heart of things, and leave vain talkings.
To our further honour still !

An orient gem
Of Plumworth, your lost friend, has passed, I am told,
Into the hands of—hem ! No names.

You catch
My doubts, I see, which I long since—I speak it
To my own wisdom—with some glory, too,
I must confess—Enough ! Wise heads, few words ;
So, in short breath, know, Hardfist is now within,
Waiting your clerk's arrival, who the sale
Negotiated. Will you help to lift
Out of this thick, profound, Serbonian bog,
The truth ?

BELOE.

My lord, I am disturbed. A matter
Presses my spirits, which . . .

EARL.

Oh ! we 'll excuse you ;
Being, I should hope, sufficient of ourselves
For all things.

To our further honour still !

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.

A mean apartment in the house of MRS. ATHERLY.

Enter NOEL (a small book is in his hand, which he peruses wildly. He looks a statue riveted; suddenly starting in eager pace, he traverses the stage in great disorder of mind. Then advancing slowly to the front, again he stands musing, and muttering to himself, for some moments before he speaks aloud.)

NOEL.

Oh fool! to doubt it. Heart, art thunder proof?
I could fall flat upon the earth, curse . . . Curse
That way, pray this, my passion is so strong.
Where shall I hide me from the piercing day?
Critic? No; Scorpion! Liar! Libeller!
Well, what dost say?

(Returns to the perusal, talking to himself or repeating from the book here and there aloud incoherently.)

"I stammer where I meant to sing!" ha! ha!
Fame—fame for me! The malefactors' son!
Which way, or from what hope, do I aspire,
To leave *my* name upon the harpstring? *I*
Achieve the bards' renown? I, skillless quite!
I am but rightly served. My dream is out.
Oh aching time! Cannot I build? New mould
Beautiful things like life, for the delight
Of the world's children?—

Monstrous forms are mine!

Portents of ruin, dismay and fall. But that
Which bars the arrow Let me look again!

(Turns over the leaves.)

"Convicted felon!" "Scaped!" I'll read no more.
"By a lady!" Only for her sex, I'd spurn
The fiend, and trample on her neck—*thus! thus!*
(*Dashes the book to the ground and stamps upon it madly.*)

Enter MRS. ATHERLY.

MRS. ATHERLY.

My son, dear Noel, child, what art thou doing?
Of late so gentle, what hath come to you?

NOEL.

At last—You are the very party, mother,
To explain this pleasant, damned news I hear.
You must know all about it, I suppose.

MRS. ATHERLY.

About what? Ha! your face is flushed, your eyes
Stand fixed and burning, and your hand,—what's this?

NOEL.

Now by——But I am quiet—mother—I—
Do you hear me?—

MRS. ATHERLY.

I am old. Life's taper flickers;
My oil's burnt out—a breath, and all were darkness;
Do not you shape that breath.

NOEL.

Your husband, madam?

MRS. ATHERLY.

My mind sinks!

NOEL.

Out! alas! he is dead. Long years
Are past since first you lost him.

MRS. ATHERLY.

Lost him?—never!

In thrice ten lingering years no moment's light
Breaks on my eyes but brings his image with it.

Days, months, and years have grown, but with them grew
My pain at his absence.

NOEL.

Pish! He is no more.

Dead, buried, and the weight of many winters
Lies heavy on his grave. It is not likely
He can have risen, and you not know it, hey?

MRS. ATHERLY (*in a faint voice*).

I think he has gone on his dark journey.

NOEL.

Think!

Will you not swear it?

MRS. ATHERLY.

Oh! sweet heavens!

NOEL.

Shrink not!

Spirits ere now have ta'en their bodily shapes,
Have shown their lean forms shut within the bars
Of dungeons, thence to vanish far away,
And none know whither.

MRS. ATHERLY.

You talk wildly, Noel,

To me. My own boy!

What hast heard?

NOEL.

Come tell me—

It is high time—am I a felon's offspring,
As, from the rottenness of gall and malice,
I have been stained withal?

MRS. ATHERLY.

Oh! Death had summoned

Me to my eternal audit long ago,
But loving cares for thee still put him off.

That then I had died !

(*After a pause.*) Faith ! yield unto my will,
And do not ask me further.

NOEL.

Seek no further !

'T were to be dead to all respects of honour.
You turn your head, you cover up your face,
And yet you saw I would not lift my eyes
To question with your visage.

Was my father

(*NOEL's voice dies away inaudibly.*)

MRS. ATHERLY.

You may well think there's cause.

NOEL.

But shall I dare

To think it a thing possible. (*He stops short, fixing inquiring eyes on MRS. ATHERLY.*)

My fears

Shoot an ice through me !

MRS. ATHERLY.

Dare to think the worst.

The world includes not aught more miserable.

NOEL.

Yet for all that say not——

MRS. ATHERLY.

It must come forth.

Take then the truth—tried was he, and——

NOEL (*interrupting*).

He never,

Never could be so——

MRS. ATHERLY.

And—and was convicted !

NOEL (*gaspingly*).

Of what crime ?

MRS. ATHERLY.

FORGERY !

NOEL.

Silence cover me !

(He sinks down upon a chair, covering his face with his hands.)

MRS. ATHERLY.

Noel, my son, bear up ! You are overcome
With grief.

NOEL.

Not much, not much. Let me alone !
Anguish is dealing with me. Yet one word ;
Though tried, condemn'd, he was most innocent ?
He was—you knew he was ?

MRS. ATHERLY.

Alas ! he was not !

NOEL.

I have no hope. Earth ! hide me in thy womb !

MRS. ATHERLY.

Ruin had overwhelmed us, no resource.
In his despair, the fatal strong temptation
Took hold upon him—was conceived, rejected,
But still returned again, until at last,
Impatient under pride-created wants,
He forged a draft, and was detected, tried,
Convicted,—but contrived to break from prison.

NOEL *(breathlessly)*.

And is my father living ?

MRS. ATHERLY.

Since his flight,
Inquiry, labouring, lost its fruitless prayer.
Report gave out his death. Alas ! too truly.
He could not else in want's bleak storm have left us
Without *one* tender line to speak his love.

Yes, doubtless, he is free from life-remorse,
For having undone his wife and child.

NOEL.

The judge

Had he passed sentence, when ?

(MRS. ATHERLY *mournfully inclines her head.*)

What was the sentence ?

(MRS. ATHERLY *in deep distress attempts to reply,
but cannot.*)

NOEL (*apart*).

And this injurious tale's ripp'd up to blast
My darling fame !

(*He kneels.*)

Revenge ! I kneel to thee !

By what name shall I pull confusion down
From Justice on her head, hath cut my heart ?
Oh ! hide she this side hell, this female devil,
Who ransacks tombs for pastime, to the incense
Wells from these depths respond in her disclosure !
I task thee, righteous minister ! Thou hearest !
My soul's a prophet—*I shall be revenged !*

(NOEL *rises.*)

Enter ANNA.

ANNA.

Sir, there is below a messenger from Whitehall, who
bade me say, Earl Bridgeton requires your immediate
attendance at his residence.

NOEL.

I'll hasten thither. Go !

[*Exit ANNA.*

You have not told me

To what the law condemned . . .

MRS. ATHERLY (*feebly*).

O ! spare me ! I

Shall shortly be with them that rest.

NOEL (*fiercely*).

Although

It kill thee to declare, and me to hear,
I must now know the truth.

The man we mentioned—

What was his sentence ? Come ! I gasp !

MRS. ATHERLY (*solemnly*).

To suffer,

As men who end their days at Tyburn suffer !

NOEL (*furiously*).

Shame burn my cheeks to cinder ? Fare-thee-well !

MRS. ATHERLY (*as he is rushing out*).

Leave me not yet ! I implore you, Noel, stay !
Your dying mother asks it.

[*Exit* NOEL.

(*In piteous accents.*) What ! in vain ?

(*After a pause, more calmly.*)

His human nature's by one idol sear'd,
Deep in his core intense, where love and peace,
Like early dews by the great sun exhaled,
Have vanished.

Re-enter NOEL. *He throws himself at her feet.*

NOEL.

Mother, bless your wretched son !

MRS. ATHERLY.

For the last time, perchance,—this kiss !

(*She raises her hands to bless him, and sinks.*)

NOEL.

Ho ! Anna !

Enter ANNA.

Look to your mistress! I'll be back anon;
My heart is dead within me!

[Exit NOEL.

*(ANNA places MRS. ATHERLY on a chair, and bends
over her.)*

(The scene closes.)

END OF ACT FIRST.

ACT II.

SCENE I.

An apartment in ELRINGTON'S villa at Lambeth—bow-window opening from the lawn.

EVA seated (her hand upon her forehead, her complexion mellowed into a paleness, significant of the pensive softness of her mind).

Enter BELOE (through the open window, wrapped in a large cloak, and followed by Attendant).

ATTENDANT.

What would you?

BELOE.

I have in charge the delivery of a letter to Miss Elrington, which I must give myself.

ATTENDANT.

This trust in servants is a jewel. There sits the Lady you require.

[Exit Attendant.]

BELOE (*fixing his eyes intently on EVA*).

Why Nature make so fair a superficialities,
To enclose so false a heart?

EVA (*in reverie*).

Oh! credit me!

A father's life, my dear friend.

(Starting.) Ah! a dream!

(Seeing BELOE.)

As strange as thou art . . . What's thy business?

BELOE.

'Tis I.

EVA.

Who is 't? I know you not, sir!

BELOE (*with melancholy emphasis*).

Eva!

EVA (*with a faint scream*).

Ha! again!

BELOE (*in a voice of mournful reproach*).

Eva!

EVA (*bursting into tears*).

Oh!

BELOE.

You are bountiful

In tears! Our tie of friendship asks no more.

A running knot, slips easily at a wish,

Should leave no trace behind.

EVA.

Could I forget

The generous, tender guardian of my girlhood,

Who on these shores received the unfriended exile,—

Whose kindly feelings treated the lone child

Even as a sister, and who left a tie

So strong upon my heart, as time shall not

Dissolve, till it dissolve itself?

BELOE.

Thou hast lost

That which outvalues far the airy honours

Which thou wilt wed. You know not what faith is.

EVA.

I thought, when you did not return to England,

And never wrote, nor sent, after you held

That interview with Plumworth, whom my father

Chose always for his mouthpiece, your proposals
Having been declined, that you had forsaken Eva.

BELOE (*putting his hand to his heart, and throwing his
eyes wildly to heaven*).

How could you think so?

EVA.

Still I had never proved
Untrue, but for my father. Oh! he threatened,
Soothed me; and when he saw 't was all in vain,
Produced a vial of Morphia, whose dew
Is wont to steep in sleep his tortured sense.
" Daughter," he weeping cried, " if still obdurate,
This lenitive juice shall through my veins, benumbed,
Stream quick destruction!" Then, allayed with tears,
The drops of death he raised, nor had escaped,
But by my swift prevention, while I shrieked
Compliance with his will.

He took my hand
Just as Lord Finmore entered, placing it
In his. I swooned!—'T was done!

BELOE (*reproachfully*).

Thy father, Eva!

So lately known to thee, could his affection
Compare with mine?

Oh! for one word with Plumworth!
He—he beguiled me,—bade me keep abroad,—
Refrain to write, and then, ere six months past,
He'd use prevailing means with Elrington,
To cause him smile upon my hopes.

EVA.

Wast so?

Wast thou so wronged? Then Heaven have mercy on us!

BELOE.

If your soft bosom be not turned to marble,
You will have mercy, Eva.

EVA.

Beloe, make not
My duty yet more painful. What we might
Have been unto each other, now avails not.
I, though my sire relented, from my word
Cannot recede . . . Beyond retreat engaged !

(BELOE *flings away, and takes two or three hurried
turns through the room, then approaches EVA.*)

BELOE.

Oh, torturing thought ! And is it come to this ?
Our mutual hopes, our oft-repeated wishes—
Breathed from the fervent soul, and full of heaven—
All come to this ?

(EVA *stretches out her hand to BELOE ; he presses it
between both of his, and bathes it with his tears.*)

EVA.

Oh ! if the heart you wring thus
Have wronged you, Beloe, you are revenged enough.

BELOE (*a languid colour reddening his cheek*).
Revenged on thee ! Yea, thus ! (*Kneels.*)

May every blessing
This life can furnish, be thy portion, Eva !
And shower upon thee, long after the tongue
That asks it is stilled for ever, and the heart
That now throbs with the prayer, hath ceased its throbbing.

EVA.

For pity speak not thus !—Live and be happy,
Beloe ! as happy as your virtues merit !—
As Eva wishes !

BELOE.

Let no thought of me
Disturb the lofty joys which Heaven allots thee.
Fare,—fare-thee-well, for ever !

(BELOE presses EVA's hand to his lips with convulsive affection, gazing on her with unutterable anguish; then, after a long pause, during which they look at one another with the highest agitation and most tender distress, covering his face with his hands, his breast heaving with repressed sobs, he suddenly rushes out of the room.)

EVA (*sinking into a chair*).

Wretched hour!

Enter LORD FINMORE.

LORD FINMORE.

Ha! who is he? My own adored! Who left
Your apartment as I entered?

EVA.

Mr. Beloe.

LORD FINMORE.

What, thy cast suitor? Best of joys!

I learned

Beloe's proposals for your hand had been
Most properly rejected by your father,
In the first answer I received from ——

(*Trying to recollect.*) from

What was your low-lived agent's name . . the man
With the o'ergorged and bloated purse, in Lisbon?

EVA.

Plumworth, my lord.

LORD FINMORE.

Ay, Plumworth. You have heard
The wealthy fellow has strangely disappeared,
And left no trace, no track? You must remember,
I do not say communed with, this same merchant?

EVA.

So young I came to England, memory faints
Striving to trace his image. But my father

Was even more a stranger when he joined me
Last June, for since my infancy we had not
Beheld each other.

LORD FINMORE.

Singular! And wherefore?

EVA.

I know not that. But I was ta'en to nurture
By Plumworth, who some few years after sent me
To England.

LORD FINMORE.

Eva, though thy dazzling beauty
Shines without parallel, and though thy dower
Equals some storehouse of earth's minerals,
Yea, though I give my loosen'd thoughts to rapture,
Languishing for thee unto death, wert sprung
From a mechanic tradesman, such as Plumworth,
Who forced his wretched soul to crouch to profit,
You could not share my title.

Enter Attendant.

Heyday! Sirrah?

ATTENDANT.

My lord, a person on business with Mr. Elrington has
just alighted, who, by direction of Earl Bridgeton,
brought this missive for your lordship.

LORD FINMORE (*haughtily*).

Give it at once.

(*Attendant reaches the letter and exit.*)

LORD FINMORE (*opening the letter*).

Now noble sire, what would you,
(*in mocking tone*) To our further honour?

Rage of death!

What's this?

Must be postponed?

Durst any mortal else

Venture to brave my fury thus ?

Wouldst think it ?

Grief to my soul ! This father of mine, Eva,
Writes here, we must forego the blessed rites
To-morrow promised. Must we ? If we do !
Thou airy name of filial duty, hence.—
And find, like smoke, a burial in the clouds !
Thus I expire thy essence !

EVA.

Does the earl

Forbid your union ?

LORD FINMORE.

At the eleventh hour !

“ *Sufficing reasons !* ” They were cast on me
As fools throw oil on fire. What ! with heart ready
To leap into thy breast, not wed ?

EVA.

My lord,

Your sire would have you seek a nobler choice.

LORD FINMORE (*violently*).

I'll not defer the ceremony an hour,
Though Hymen, gathering all his flames about him,
Took stand to blast, not bless us.

(*In a tender voice.*)

Suffer not

This interdiction stagger thy soft nature,
But let our chaplain on the morrow echo
The contract of our hearts.

EVA (*coldly*).

You must excuse me

Consulting with my father.

LORD FINMORE.

Now, by heavens !

Thy modest sweetness shall not interpose
A new impediment.

(EVA remains coldly silent with look averted, where not one softness glows, but a dubious expression of joy and fear, shifting, clouds her varied cheek.)

Enter NOEL ATHERLY.

LORD FINMORE (*to* NOEL).

Thou saucy slave!

Intrude here unannounced?

NOEL.

I have to speak

With Mr. Elrington, to whom the usher,—

LORD FINMORE.

Pray hold your breath. Be'st Noel Atherly?
Who burst away . . . Thou art, however called,
Strangely unmannered, I can vouch. But are you
The man sir, I would know?

NOEL.

I should be loth

Deny my name, albeit

LORD FINMORE (*interrupting, to* EVA).

My angel, since

This varlet hath invaded

(*To* NOEL.) Art thou not

Gone yet?

(*To* EVA.) The next apartment.

(EVA inclines her head in token of acquiescence. As they are retiring.)

NOEL.

I'm subjected

To these repeated insults; but Earl Bridgeton

LORD FINMORE (*hotly*).

The devil and Earl Bridgeton!

[*Exeunt* LORD FINMORE and EVA.]

NOEL (*alone.*)

(*Bitterly through his teeth.*)

To the rest,

Add that!

(*After a pause.*)

Why, what tame pitiful thing I've grown
To tolerate all slights of such as triumph
In mere externals! proud of an eclipse
Of man's true glory!

But that something prompts me,
Despite my scorn of breath, to seek the harpy
Hath crown'd me with such filth, that never can I
More put down insult; no, not with an eye,—
Only for vengeance on her, all life's work
Were ended.

Enter Gentleman Usher.

USHER.

You are from his honour's banker, sir, I take it?

NOEL.

As I said, sir.

USHER (*looking significantly*).

I've done your errand, sir.

NOEL.

Well, sir?

USHER (*significantly*).

I am cumbered with an office, sir.

NOEL.

What place hast?

USHER (*indignantly*).

Place, sir?

It were right to use me

With more respect.

I am charged, sir, to induct you
Into his altitude's presence.

NOEL.

Well, announce me.

USHER (*holding out his hand*).
Your courtesy to keep my palm still supple.

NOEL.
Your master pay your duty, most attentive
Gentleman in waiting!

USHER.
It were no impair,
A compliment to me; the greatest take one
For less. The entrée here is not so common.
(*After a pause, in an insolent tone.*)
You'll come this way.

(*Surveying him uncivilly.*)
I judged just what you were
By your no better outside. [*Exit Usher.*]

NOEL.
With what pride
He importunes a bribe! who, were he clad
In his own native thread-bare suit, would feel him,
And look the menial he is! Oh, world!
Whether I more despise or hate thy glosses
I know not.

(*About to make his exit.*)
Enter LADY CLARISSA POMPAS.

LADY CLARISSA.
Oh, all ye bless'd above! 't is he! Sir, stay!

NOEL (*stopping short*).
Lady?
(*Aside.*) *The same!* But I will not be known!

LADY CLARISSA (*aside*).
I cannot speak for sighs.
(*Aloud.*) Whoe'er thou art,
It were not natural, did I not joy
To meet and thank thee, unto whom, next heaven,
I owe that I'm alive.

NOEL.

I bless my fortune

In making me its instrument to save you,
Though 't was no more than duty.

LADY CLARISSA.

When I asked,

Whose hand my life had from a watery grave
Delivered, you retired abrupt. My soul
Desires to know thee, and would call thee friend.

(NOEL *turns away*.)*Re-enter Usher.*

USHER.

You would be exalted with an audience,
I understood. I'm not retained to wait, sir!—
I'll follow you.

NOEL (*to* LADY CLARISSA).

May I entreat the favour

Now to withdraw? I am your honoured servant.

[*Exit* NOEL.]

LADY CLARISSA.

Elude me not again! Oh, sir!

(To *Usher*.) Return.[*Exit Usher*.]

'T would seem he shunned me! and I fly my sex,
My honour, noble blood, my virgin pride,
To let my thoughts run madly on a man
Unknown. But destiny enforceth me
To entertain some sense of gratitude.
Gratitude? No! Gross fires spread by degrees;—
The subtler flames flash out at once,—'tis *Love*!

Re-enter Usher.

USHER.

Your ladyship was pleased express a wish
I re-appear. My duties wait upon you.

LADY CLARISSA.

Who was that gentleman you just led hence?

USHER.

Gentleman?

LADY CLARISSA.

Ay, who left the room with you?

USHER.

You mean the banker's clerk on business
To Mr. Elrington? I seldom trouble
My language with unprofitable questions,
Nor asked his name, for what I asked he stinted.

LADY CLARISSA.

A clerk? He is well demeaned.

USHER.

Ay, passably.

LADY CLARISSA.

And speaks well too.

USHER.

And freely.

LADY CLARISSA.

Banker's clerk?

USHER.

His habit shows it.

LADY CLARISSA.

(Aside.) But were he adorned,
Set off to show and glory! What 's to me?
(Aloud.) Comes he again?

USHER.

I know not.

LADY CLARISSA.

'Tis no matter.

USHER.

So I suppose.

LADY CLARISSA.
That's all I wanted.

USHER.

Always

Obedient.

[*Exit Usher.*

LADY CLARISSA.

(*A softness and languor in the light and motion of her eyes.*)

Fie on me! How come these fancies
Buzz in my brains?

I yet must speak with him!

[*Exit.*

SCENE II.

Another apartment in ELRINGTON's villa. A desk on the table. ELRINGTON, his visage haggard, emaciated, and fleshless, in a state of decrepitude and paralytic, discovered reclining in an easy chair.

ELRINGTON.

Three score and ten! Curs'd withering heap of ills!
Ye monstrous pile of plagues!

How happy were it
Could *here* my being's consciousness, spun out
To hoary wretchedness, be closed!

No world
But *only this*, that who does wrong may never
Hear of it more.

Were death then sent to call me,
With what alacrity I'd shift this coil off,

Which is but sense of pain ; yea, would forestall
Annihilation.

But to drag my chain
Of doubts, remorse, fears, fruitless hopes, despairs ;
Mankind's peculiar ! into the grave,
Doth reconcile the worst can happen to me
On earth's Aceldama. There's horrid danger
Lurks in the very air I breathe ! Dank fears
Mine element, and in mine inner man
Gibbeted by piecemeal ! Therefore, my resolve
To . . . he ! he ! he ! see nobody ?

What brings me
Then from mine own apartment to hold parley
With,—who is 't ? *Ledger's dead !*

And I am abandoned
To my resources . . . fine resources truly !
Behold them *here !* bound *thus !* to this vile clog
Of cumb'rous age manacled hand and foot,
More surely than were chains and dungeons—Ah !
Suspend that thought ! Have mercy on me, Heaven !
Let not my senile weakness blab that—*that—*

Enter NOEL.

(ELBRINGTON faintly shrieks, rising with difficulty, and
holding by the chair in dreadful agitation.)

Who art thou, sir ? What wouldst ? *I'll not be captured.*
I am not the man.

(*Recovering himself.*) Your pardon !

(*Aside.*) From my banker ?

(*Reseats himself*)

(*Aloud.*) Your business ?

NOEL.

From Beloe's.

It became

My province to negotiate the sale
Of a rare gem on your account with Hardfist ;
Which, it appears, the diamond merchant, Plumworth
Not long since bought of a London lapidary.

ELRINGTON (*in a deep, hollow voice*).

Here's horror !

(*Violently.*) Cursèd stone ! Would it were smashed
Into impalpable dust ! There 's not a beam
It darts but carries Hell.

The jeweller sent you ?

NOEL (*aside*).

Rather I 'm here Earl Bridgeton's emissary.
(*Aloud.*) To say he will call.

It is but to the clearing
Of some few doubts a conference is required,
I ought to say entreated. He would fain
Obtain a sight of an acknowledgment
In Plumworth's writing, of the diamond's price.

ELRINGTON (*fiercely*).

Hell and perdition ! Dare suspect my honour ?
(*In agitation, apart.*)

A word might cause more question,—give a thousand
Fatal inquiries birth ! till in the end . . .

(*He pauses.*)

(*His agitation gradually increases, till it is no longer
capable of control. In the accents of passionate
violence.*)

No soul shall come to speech, save through thick portals !
Else bursten locks—bolts shotten back, with which
I'll barricade me ! Sooner be entombed,
Low as earth's central cavern ! There a corpse
Will I be dogg'd, or they shall reach my person !

(*After a pause, more calmly.*)

My soul, collect thyself !

Can I not scatter

These clouds that darken round the electric gem ?
 Would he some voucher ? He ! he ! he ! Methinks
 I can oblige him *there !*

(*After a pause.*) I might, were Ledger
 But now ? What best to put in act I know not !
 At such a nick for him to die !

(*The eyes of ELRINGTON wander with vague and unsteady
 gaze, till they gradually settle on the countenance of
 NOEL.*)

From Beloe's ?

NOEL.

Sir, were you pleased to speak ?

ELRINGTON (*aside*).

Methinks his voice,

Stronger than music, thrills upon my ears !

Can it be memory ?

(*To NOEL.*) Your name, my friend ?

(*NOEL turns his head aside in agitation.*)

NOEL (*after a pause*).

My name imports not. I, in Beloe's house,
 Hold humble station : Yet, even so, 't is one
 More honourable than my name.

ELRINGTON.

His mien

Is most prevailing : and I feel impelled
 To build my safety on his secrecy.

(*To NOEL.*)

Prithee, be seated ! Let us talk at ease.
 I'll not detain you ; but I am indisposed,
 Unnerved, as you see ; infirm with age
with age !

And otherwise bereft and desolate.

Hearken !

(*ELRINGTON lays his hand on the arm of NOEL.*)

But first make fast that door.

(NOEL secures the door.)

I thank you.

I shall be proud to advance your fortunes, sir.
But take an oath to keep inviolate
What I shall whisper.

NOEL.

Sir, if you engage
There's no dishonour, I will take 't.

ELRINGTON.

Dishonour?

What's that? Oh, none!

NOEL.

With this reserve, I swear.

ELRINGTON.

Draw your chair nearer.

(NOEL seats himself nearer, and ELRINGTON half raises
himself till his mouth reaches the ear of NOEL.)

(After a pause, significantly.)

You remember Ledger,
Sole witness present, telling you that Plumworth
Sold me the brilliant?

NOEL.

How can I remember

What ne'er occurred?

ELRINGTON.

Tut! dull of apprehension?

You are to make good my title. There's no falsehood,
Save in so far you knew it not till now.
Why hesitate? I pledge you life, salvation,
That in so testifying, you will witness
To all intents the truth. You recollect it?

NOEL.

It may be so, but

ELRINGTON (*aside*).

But his oath may fail

To bind him! No help else?

(*Looks around him bewildered.*)

(*Aloud.*) A desk,—my daughter's:

Paper and pens you'll find enclosed:—

'T is open.

Pray write me out a note in the name of Plumworth.

NOEL.

I understand not.

ELRINGTON.

Let us be composed,

I pray. No need for trembling; none. For haste,

None,—none! 'T is haste makes waste, and waste . . .

Be seated.

NOEL (*preparing to sit down to the desk*).

I can stop short at will. I'll act this further.

(NOEL *seats himself, and opens the desk. He is about to write. Suddenly he starts up, holding MSS. in his hand, with which he presently rushes to the front of the stage; there he turns over leaf after leaf in restless trepidation. His lips quiver apart: his eyebrows are uplifted, and his dilated orbs remain fixed upon the page, as if they would sear up the writing they glanced over.*)

ELRINGTON.

What have you there?

NOEL (*in a hollow voice, apart, without taking his eyes from the writing.*)

What blasts mine eyes to gaze on!

Help me, my quickened senses! Phrase for phrase,

And word for word, the copy of the onslaught

Upon my peace, my fame,—that paragraph
Only awaiting. (*Striking his heart.*)

And that's texted here!

ELRINGTON.

You drive me to amazement.

NOEL (*in great agitation, but in a voice of forced calmness*).

By your favour;

That desk? You said your daughter's?

ELRINGTON.

Eva's surely.

NOEL.

Both Heaven and Fate are just!

(*Approaches close to ELRINGTON.*)

Your daughter's hand.

Is *this* sir? (*striking the paper violently*).

This, I hold? You know the writing?

ELRINGTON (*looking at the writing*).

Her character, I think.

NOEL.

She can be caustic.

ELRINGTON.

Is the man mad?

NOEL.

Yea, bitter, *very* bitter!

And 't was your daughter penn'd this essay, sir?

ELRINGTON.

She's skill'd to turn a period; but the essay—

Mine the idea, and main points.

NOEL.

Ha! indeed!

ELRINGTON (*aside*).

What 't is he so admires I never heard of.

NOEL (*aside*).

Father and daughter! Critic! Vile old wretch!

But hush! I'll not rail now; *I can do better*.

ELRINGTON.

Prithee, reseat thee.

NOEL.

Well:—

(Seats himself again at the desk.)

What must I write?

ELRINGTON.

*Lisbon, 8th January, 1724.**Received from the Honourable Charles Elrington the sum of one hundred and fifty thousand guineas, for an oriental diamond weighing two hundred carats.*

When drawn I'll sign it.

NOEL.

You? that cannot be.

ELRINGTON.

Write! write! write!

NOEL *(gnaws his quivering lip; a smothered passion shakes through his frame).**(Aside.)* Furies break into my mind

With flaming brands!

From out this desk I'll blot

No paper; but I've here a useless letter . . .

(Takes a letter from his pocket, whence he tears off the cover.)

Fair superscription! On thy margin blank

I'll raise a strong-born mischief.

So to catch

Yon hoary sinner!

ELRINGTON *(while NOEL is writing).*

How my soul starts back

From this inquiry!

Would that I could shun it!

NOEL.

I have fulfilled your orders

(He hands the paper to ELRINGTON.)

ELRINGTON (*looking it over*).

(*To NOEL.*)

All quite right.

Paralysis usurps upon my strength;
I need your aid to sign.

NOEL (*surprised*).

You?

ELRINGTON.

At that table

Place me. Good!—that dipp'd pen:

(*NOEL wheels the chair of ELRINGTON up to the desk, and hands him a pen.*)

Now hold my arm

The while I trace the acknowledgment.

(*NOEL supports the arm of ELRINGTON—he writes.*)

'T is done!

NOEL.

Stupendous chance! What's written? *Plumworth's*
name?

ELRINGTON.

Keep troth! Old Ledger found it politic.
When will the jeweller?

NOEL.

Eleven to-morrow—

With a friend.

ELRINGTON (*aside*).

The hour that will hedge round my Eva
With triple adamant—rank, wealth, and love.
To mar the heaven of such auspicious ceremony
No breath should stir.

How then?

For once, but once,

Suppose I venture forth? (*after a pause—aloud.*)

I will be with

Hardfist, not he wend hither.

Saidst thou aught

Of some one present ?

Ha ! I like not that !

NOEL.

A friend, sir.

ELRINGTON.

Rather spy. Who, from the weakness
Of age, my faltering tones . . . (*Breaks off.*)

It would suffice

Did you attend with this acquittance, so
An interview, both needless and unpleasing,
I might be spared.

(*ELRINGTON offers the document, which NOEL declines to receive.*)

Perhaps 't were better not.

No breath of *how* we compassed that same . . .

(*Pauses.*)

NOEL.

Forgery !

(*The blood forsakes at once the complexion of ELRINGTON, and then rushes back again with rapidity and fierceness.*)

ELRINGTON.

Be dumb ! You know you gave an oath !

At Hardfist's

By eleven . . Wait : I will not, that 's—I will.

NOEL.

So I'll deliver.

ELRINGTON.

Bear his answer back—

NOEL.

I take my leave.

(*Aside.*) If now, my soul, thou 'rt dull,

May I live and die the scorn of worms!

To the Earl's.

[*Exit* NOEL.]

ELRINGTON (*alone*).

I'm at a frightful pass!

Had I conceived

That, before Eva were in happy bands

Bound past release, and I, a second time,

Had fled this land of snares, a straw could rise

To attract attention to me,

strandless seas

Should still have rolled 'twixt me and such dread chance

Of question;—

Which enforced . . . (*Pauses.*)

"T would prove less ruin.

Than——

(*Pauses in agitation, then with a voice of agonized horror.*)

Gracious God!

That I had kept from England!

(*He sinks in his chair, covering his face with his hands.*)

(*Scene closes.*)

END OF ACT SECOND.

ACT III.

SCENE I.

*Lawn leading to the Thames before EARL BRIDGETON'S
Mansion in Whitehall.*

Enter LORD FINMORE and LADY CLARISSA.

LADY CLARISSA.

By order of my father, not my will,
I may not be her bridesmaid.

LORD FINMORE.

Wherefore, sister,
Obey such mandate? I am full of wrath.

LADY CLARISSA (*half aside*).

I never knew you other.

LORD FINMORE.

His wise lordship!
He may descend life's downward slope alone
Into the grave! By heavens! I will disclaim him,
Throw him from my blood—set eyes on him no more!
Is he within?

LADY CLARISSA.

There are persons present with him
On business.

LORD FINMORE.

Hardfist's one. His vile aspersion!
I'll make the Earl recall the extorted doom.

[*Exit LORD FINMORE.*

LADY CLARISSA (*alone. Her looks sicklied with a kind of thoughtful sadness*).

Methought he crossed the lobby! I but walk
Of late a loving dream. One pleasing image
Haunts in the vacancy of air my fancy;
One sweet idea my soul, from her store of thought,
Draws out.

Ah! how to call the charming phantom?
He comes this way. Hence he depart not till . . .

Enter NOEL and HARDFIST.

(*Lady Clarissa retires up the stage.*)

HARDFIST.

Indebted to Earl Bridgeton's patronage,
And, having just provided bridal gifts,
Aware of the impending union . . .
'T was right to unfold a matter which lays open
Unto conjecture's dubious ken, the motive
Why Elrington so keeps himself in clouds.

NOEL (*with a Sardonic smile*).

'T was most discreet, sir, in you.

Recollect

What I have hinted touching his acquittance.
Inspect the same should Elrington produce it,
Narrowly.

I did not indicate, by name,
The Earl as being the party present with ye.

HARDFIST.

So his lordship's will enjoined.

Good afternoon.

NOEL.

Your servant, sir.

[*Exit HARDFIST.*

(*NOEL paces up and down, and then stopping short.*)

The immaculate world, huge lie!
Self-blinded! Whited wall! Must lift the brow

Because the heat of circumstance engendered
To my sire's ruin that germ of guilt which lies
Conceal'd in every breast! But Elrington,—
For *him* to stab for frailty proper to him!

LADY CLARISSA (*apart*).

To express what my heart labours with!

(*To NOEL.*)

Forgive me.

NOEL.

Fair stranger, I 've affairs elsewhere exact me.

LADY CLARISSA.

Stranger? You have seen this face.

NOEL.

I am apt to quarrel

With my ambitious eyes for having soared so.

LADY CLARISSA.

Could it no more be seen, which but for you
Had chanced, 't were well, if no impressive truth,
That strove for utterance with the gurgling waves,
And vowed me yours, remain in memory.

NOEL.

'T would argue me uncivil to make question
You speak in jest.

LADY CLARISSA (*after a pause*).

The honour of my birth

And bashfulness of youth, by the illapse
Of the sweet poignant thought of what I owe you;
My life . . . myself! are drowned in heart-shed tears.

NOEL (*aside*).

Oh, garland fine, to hang upon a tomb!
(*Aloud.*) Far more unequal than e'en love's own power
Can hope to reconcile, our lots. On mine,

Blue plague hath, as it passed, shed visible taint;
I stand for ever lonely.

LADY CLARISSA,

Nay, dear sir,—

Wilt please vouchsafe thy story?

NOEL.

You shall learn

The misery you pursue, and as disgrace
Fly me.

LADY CLARISSA.

Thou need'st not think it.

NOEL.

I am wont

To let soft leisure wing th' excursive soul
Amid the bright abstractions of the muse.
My verse, I was led to fancy, augured fame,
And in fame fortune, and I smiled to think
My widow'd parent would unwonted comforts

*(Pauses in evident distress—then more resolutely, but with
faltering tones.)*

Well, a blight smote me! An invisible hand
Launch'd forth a bolt of malice shattered all.

LADY CLARISSA *(in a faint voice)*.

Your verse! A critic?

NOEL.

Who such Upas gloom

Flung round me, hope lies blasted 'neath the poison,
Eclipsed for ever!

LADY CLARISSA *(aside in accents of horror)*.

I am struck! *What if*

He were——? It were too terrible!——

(Aloud.)

Oh! scorn

To feel unmann'd through those indignities

Which vicious persons cast on merit—or
If true, be thankful that

NOEL (*breaking in*).

That I am a wretch?
That hope's torn from me like a limb o' the heart,
And I left bleeding?

(*After a pause more calmly.*)

How I was maligned,
And in how poor and base a way my writings
Were blacken'd through warped extracts, and their scope
Strained and distorted out of envious spleen
Boots not to unfold, nor moves me now,—
(*He pauses ; then with a look expressive of acute sensibility.*)

Enough :

With Hell's strong hand to blot me out of time,
From Hope's pavilion high to hurl me headlong,
This fiend blazoner proclaim'd me offspring
Of a convict !

LADY CLARISSA.

To my own recoiling gaze
How monstrous I show !

NOEL.

All, *all* but this
I could have borne, nay, treated with contempt,
But *this*, like a headlong torrent, overflows
The frame of nature ! He that gives us life,
The stigma *he* incurs is our hearts' too,
Incorporate till death !

LADY CLARISSA (*aside*).

Struck dumb with fear !

NOEL.

You see I am not worthy to look on you.
But there's revenge in Gilead ! Conscious angels
Shoot plagues to help me.

LADY CLARISSA.

Fiends and furies shoot them !

Man's attribute is love, and not revenge,—

On whom ?

NOEL.

This fell assassin of my peace,
I am on her trail ! I have her in my eye !

LADY CLARISSA (*with a faint shriek*).Have *her* in your eye ? A woman ?*(Aside.)*

Starting conscience

Flies from the truth. A sickly faintness passes
Over my heart.

(Aloud.)

I had no cognizance

That———(*hesitates.*)NOEL (*surprised*).

Honoured lady ?

Enter LORD FINMORE *from behind.*LORD FINMORE (*aside*).

Heaven ! She courts the wretch

Who scornful turns.

LADY CLARISSA (*aside*).

But one way left with honour.

(Aloud.)

Forgive her, I'll partake my life with thee
Before all other blessings.

(A faint glow crosses the paleness of NOEL's cheek.)

NOEL.

Canst thou think

A heart opprest with such a throng of cares
Can feel aught save revenge ?

LADY CLARISSA (*passionately*).

Or kill me then,
Or quicken, sir, a dying heart.
Depose
Your wrath : absolve the past : In my contrition . . .

NOEL.

What, absolve ? Never ! I have a foundation
On which I will erect a sweet revenge.
Miss Elrington——

LADY CLARISSA (*starting up amazed*).

What error causeth thee
Level this rage at Eva ?

NOEL.

Oh, she is
My fiend ! Of whom I—

LORD FINMORE (*advancing rudely up to NOEL*).

At her feet shall beg
Pardon, thou worm ; thou thin skin full of dirt !
And she shall tread thee into earth.

NOEL.

This outrage,—

LORD FINMORE.

Infamous slanderer !

NOEL.

You speak too proud
A language.

LORD FINMORE (*turning to LADY CLARISSA*).

From whence flow these *low* affections ?

LADY CLARISSA.

Low, my lord ? Though the pride and gloss of life
Awaiting, he hath merit in himself
Might shame our boasted honours.

LORD FINMORE.

Fool! dost know

Who he is?

LADY CLARISSA.

I've infelt bodings. Prompt they rightly,
The triumph of a lettered heart like *his*
Not all the brothers of the earth shall spoil
Me of.

LORD FINMORE.

Your minion's Noel Atherly!

LADY CLARISSA.

Then I'm confirmed; My love is simple justice.

LORD FINMORE (*to NOEL*).

You have breathed that venom in Earl Bridgeton's ear,
Foams through thy every vein: for which!

(*Pauses.*) *I'll write it.*

Afterwards cross me—champ upon thy spleen,
But mark me—Mind thy life!

(*The blood runs quicker to NOEL's cheek: his pulse beats violently for an instant and then regains its wonted saturnine temperament: he turns away.*)

LADY CLARISSA (*to NOEL*).

Oh, sir, make peace

With your own mind, and I, in scorn of time,
Envy, and ignorance, will recompense
That rash, but more unfortunate misdeed.

(LORD FINMORE *passes with* LADY CLARISSA, *pushing*
NOEL *on one side.*)

NOEL (*apart, looking bitterly toward LORD FINMORE*).

The cup of wormwood which thy bride provided,
Thou fill'st with heap'd up measure. Soon like flax
You kindle.

Gold's more slow, but burns to purpose!

[*Exit NOEL.*]

(LORD FINMORE comes forward with LADY CLARISSA.)

LORD FINMORE.

'Twould seem this scalding mandate thrust at me
Hath source in yonder ill-designing fellow.
Like a fly o'er flesh he has vented his infection
Into our father's ears. I had no patience ;
But in the midst of the earl's prelude
Of hinted meanings left him.

(After a pause, entreatingly.)

You will be bridesmaid ?

Malgre these givings out ?

LADY CLARISSA (*aside*).

It were but justice.

Some idle tale 'tis evident he has voiced,
Because he imputes—how came such strange delusion ?
My crime to Eva . . . Not *my* crime. Yet 'tis
O'erstained with doubt. How to repair the error ?

(*Aloud.*)

My lord, I've thought on 't, and will lend all aid
Within my scope to grace your secret nuptials.

LORD FINMORE.

Good sister, friends !

I will not brook delay ;

Eva shall smile consent, though to my suit
With soften'd voice, she dropp'd a faint refusal—
Unless her father Rise you with the dew.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II.

Apartment—ELRINGTON seated.

(After listening awhile.)

I am grown an aspen.

Towards the set of sun
Shadows, but small at noon, show terrible.
Yet 't is a perilous stop . . . to dash my hopes,
Hard travelling on the tottering bridge of age,
To find a home.

A little truce! Oh, heaven!
Hold at arm's-length my *lingering sudden death*
Till after Eva's bridal.—Past to-morrow,
And a new lease of life I'll take abroad,
Hiding me from myself, the while my years
Roll darkling down the torrent of my fate
Unto eternity. Out ugly thought!

Enter EVA.

ELRINGTON.

Art Eva, or her spirit?

Hast no voice

On thy bride's lips?

EVA.

A bride? Earl Bridgeton, sir,
Forbids my espousals.

ELRINGTON (*dashing his clenched hand violently on
the table*).

Hast been dreaming, fool?

EVA.

Dear sir, 't is true.

ELRINGTON (*violently*).

There 's no such thing as truth, chit.

His reasons?

EVA.

I believe none were alleged.

(ELRINGTON'S *breath is stifled by the swelling of his heart: He sinks into his chair, then directly rises from his seat, and moves away some paces, with feeble steps and slow.*)

ELRINGTON (*apart.*)

That diamond cuts deep into my fate:

The earl hath *heard*!

'T is breathed abroad—

The whispers

Thicken the air!

Can I keep my appointment,
When even the proof I may be driven to
Of innocence, must bar this match? Can I
With unblench'd front, and know *that* lurks behind
Would sink me to the centre?

Best to fly—

Forfeit the petty orient,—every thing!—

Be prompt too in the sacrifice.

But Eva?

(*After a pause of reflection.*)

She must away with me, leave rank behind.

(*After another pause, in a tone of bitter anguish.*)

For *this* I've broke my sleep! The seeds spring up,
That with brow's sweat, and heart's still-hardening,
I sowed; but when I come to harvest, teems
Dank hemlock for my pains!

(EVA *timidly approaches ELRINGTON, and lays her hand on his arm.*)

EVA.

Dear father, take not
Your disappointment so to heart. When Fate
Into your life put grief, which, by obedience,
I could transfer to mine, I felt me bound
To yield my will, though with my soul's last sigh;
But that's no matter.

ELRINGTON.

Wedlock were not death.

EVA.

I said it was no matter. I was ready
Contract into few grains my span of life,
Which, watered with my tears, might bring forth bloom
Perennial. For thy sake . . .

ELRINGTON.

You are absolved.

EVA.

Speak not so bitterly; you'd found small joy
To view my wretched greatness.

ELRINGTON.

Be not troubled!
Some hint's officious reach hath touched the ear
Of the Earl Bridgeton, that I Plumworth's wealth
Wrongfully hold. This ill-tongued rumour blights
Your wretched greatness.

(After a pause.)

We'll depart the land.

EVA.

Admit the taint spread o'er thy name? Confront
The slander!

ELRINGTON *(in a voice of horror)*.

I confront?

EVA.

To utter dumbness
Put their bold tongues. In honour's fore-right road
Walk with firm foot.

ELRINGTON.

It is a credulous world !
(ELRINGTON *covers his face with his hands.*)

EVA.

Evince more moral courage. Lonely fancies——

ELRINGTON (*breaking in*).

Like an arm'd host, have pushed me to despair !
I'm sapless, withering, my frame parched up
With horrid incubi, foul memories !
They touch my every nerve ! (*Starting.*)
E'en now, away !

EVA.

'Tis but those springs that link your soul to dust,
Are out of order.

ELRINGTON (*distractedly, dreadful ideas convulsing his
features, and working every line into an expression of
the keenest agony*).

Look ye there ! Dost see ?
Embodied to my sight ! Why, flesh and blood
Must shrink ! I cannot brook those eyes !

To stand

The gaze of the court, the burning, open shame,—
All the degrading pageantry of justice !
To kneel, to plead, too late—*too late* for mercy :
See in the doorway,—far the rest above,
Yon dreadful shadow, which obstructs our view,—
Fills up the vacant chair ! His tongueless call
The judges doom !

(*Pauses, and then in a hollow voice of horror.*)

I tell you, oft at midnight,

When anguish hath rebuked oblivious slumber,
I have heard it from afar, borne on the wind!
And then he seems relenting—*Oh, that's worse!*

(ELRINGTON staggers backwards, and sinks into a chair.)

EVA.

Compose yourself, dear sir. Down from thy brow
Big drops of horror roll. Great God! How ghastly!
(*While EVA is occupied in ministering to her father.*)

Enter NOEL.

NOEL (*apart*).

Ha! with his daughter.

Pap-faced fiend! The air
Wherein she draws her breath is fulsome to me.
Vile painted sepulchre! What harm had I
Done thee, to be selected from the stock
Of man, to brand so basely? What to thee
That—

(*Here the tone of NOEL's countenance changes from
sardonic hatred to something more intently vengeful.*)

They are absorbed in one another. Critics!
Who dip the pen in gore . . . perchance the tongue.
Devils! I'll list their parley.

(NOEL conceals himself behind a screen.)

ELRINGTON (*recovering from his raging delirium—from
ideas of horror, confusion, flight, persecution, agony,
and despair*).

Some wild words
I have spoken: 'T was a weakness. Pray, forget it.
(*After a pause.*)

I cannot dissipate their doubt unless
I produce Plumworth.

EVA.

Knowest thou his retreat?

ELRINGTON.

Why, I am *he*!

EVA.

Your hand,—I'm faint.

My father!

ELRINGTON.

Nevertheless thy father.

EVA.

Elrington?

ELRINGTON.

He is no more:

Of ancient family,
He gave you at the font his appellation,
And thereby smoothed my project of one day
To sink the very being and name of Plumworth
In his, who lived in most entire seclusion,
And died unknown 'mongst strangers.

EVA.

Sir, your motive?

ELRINGTON.

That which impels the hare, her head couched close,
The murderous cry still lessening on her ear,
To spring to *another* furze-bush.

Let it pass.

Did exigence arise, there's none in England
Could swear to—the man called Plumworth.

EVA.

Sir, forgive me.

There is a gentleman . . . (*Stops short.*)

ELRINGTON.

Ha! whom dost mean?

EVA.

Dear father! Mr. Beloe . . .

ELRINGTON (*raising his head quickly*).
He in London?

(*Aside.*)

Should it prove providential?

Idle fear

Aught can betide to need his testimony!
 So brief my stay. Yet to provide against
 A possibility of fortune's malice,
 Delusive fortune!—

(*Aloud.*) Child, I may transmit you
 My ring. (*Showing ring.*)

The which received, with suppliant voice
 Urge Beloe speed to aid his friend.

EVA.

Am I

A proper envoy?

ELRINGTON.

I have played him false.
 With suasive influence you might soften him
 To quit the retribution in his power,
 Keeping aloof. May I not, ere the sea
 Foams with my keel, be jeopard'd! So never!
 (*After some pause.*)

I have had a cutter moored upon the Thames,
 Manned, stored for flight, to waft me to repose,
 Ready, in case aught perilous even'd,
 To sail at an hour's signal,—*then to-morrow.*

Should you encounter my Lord Finmore, breathe
 No hint of our departure.

EVA.

I'll avoid him;
 Or he'll renew his pleading, that the chaplain
 Tie wedlock's sacred knot, as purpos'd.

ELRINGTON (*starting*).*What?*

Why not have mentioned this at first?

(Aside.) Might sheBe ennobled? Then in *her* my ends were compass'd;

And as the pilgrim his Arabian spice,

I shall a thought to brace my soul bear with me.

(Aloud.) Girl, when my lord solicit, be not peevish

To fence your ear against him. I'll not have you

Annul your contract.

*EVA (bursting into tears, her voice trembles in her throat,
it is lost in her tears. After a pause imploringly.)*

Pray! Good Heavens! I cannot.

ELRINGTON.

Why crowd thy tongue with fruitless exclamations,

As you were not betrothed? Reflect what greatness

Would nestle in thy bosom.

EVA.

Sir, Earl Bridgeton?

ELRINGTON.

You are not affianced to him but his young son.

I charge thee, as thou ever hopest my blessing

Or fear'st my curse, to keep thy plighted troth!

EVA (kneeling).

Let me with trembling arms embrace thy knees,

Avert from me that worst severity

Of fate. Oh outrage not my breaking heart

By these espousals. 'T were impossible!

ELRINGTON.

I'm full of tumult. New-created rage,

Rage at myself, at all the world, and thee,

Now ravages my bosom. Then be counselled,

Nor dare the deed ungovernable transports

Of one, distempered with a foul assemblage
Of guilt, despair, and shame, may tempt him act.

EVA.

Father, alas! the fury of your words
Have struck my heart like lightning dead within me.

ELRINGTON.

Since the last bribe of tasteless life, a coronet
Upon thy brow, deceive my heart—that forge
Of new gods now broke up,—this sweet Nepenthe
Shall with lethargic influence expel
My unresisting spirit.
(*He takes a small phial from his vest, and is about to drink.*)

EVA (*seizing his arm*).

Hold for mercy

The venom back!

ELRINGTON.

Life's nauseous! And my head,
Decrepit, I resign for death to seize,
And dash against the tomb.

EVA.

My heart's emotions,
They tear it so,—I cannot bear the conflict.
Oh 't is too much! Even mould me as you will,
I yield!

ELRINGTON (*replacing the phial*).

Or from my sorrow-beaten breast
This draught had stolen forth its cares, to fold them
In cold oblivion.
(*After a pause.*) I'll apprise Lord Finmore
That, all reluctant faintness fled, you will
Fulfil your engagement with him at the altar.

EVA.

Sweet filial piety! Come firm my breast,
Be nobly wretched!

ELRINGTON.

End our colloquy.

EVA.

Let me but dry my eyes.

Undone for ever !

[Exit EVA.

ELRINGTON.

I did not hint, that at the hour she weds

Unless that other clouds of black events

Ere a new morning rise, shall break . . . She dreams not,

I shall be voyaging with empty heart,

Alone, like man forbidden. So the day

Will pass, and so the morrow. And so on !

(Pauses in anguish.)

All sympathies of kin, that make on earth

Man's home a blissful heaven, I renounce.

From no responsive look my eye will catch

Before it close for ever its last solace.

But in its stead, whitherso'er I wend,

An atmosphere of cloud and of suspicion

Will girdle me about.

I wish I 'd granted Beloe's suit. I should have,

But for the yearning pride I felt to see,

My child ennobled.

Oh, I am all involved !

*(NOEL emerges from behind the screen.)*NOEL *(apart)*.

I'll not speak now, my message. His device,

Lie-built, to reach at rank, to-morrow's sun

Shall flash discovery on.

Some one approaches.

No avenue ?

*(Crosses to a folding door on the opposite side.)**(Passing through the folding door.)*

I will thread this suite of rooms.

[Exit NOEL.

ELRINGTON.

Hark, hark, a footstep!—No, it was my fear.

Enter MRS. ATHERLY.

MRS. ATHERLY (*looking around*).

Not here?

(*To* ELRINGTON.) I crave your grace for this intrusion;
I was told, Miss Elrington

ELRINGTON (*starting*).

Who art? What means this?

What brings you hither? Hey? What are you, woman?

MRS. ATHERLY.

I have made bold . . . Oh! pardon my abruptness! . .
There's need of gentle offices to avert
Bloodshed.

An angry missive from Lord Finmore,
Threatening some wanton outrage on my son,
I've chanced to intercept.

Now Noel's temper—

I dread the issue—if Miss Elrington
Decline to pacify——

(MRS. ATHERLY *during the delivery of the above had
approached close to* ELRINGTON'S chair.)

ELRINGTON (*in a broken voice*).

Avenging God!

MRS. ATHERLY (*obviously surprised*).

Sir?

ELRINGTON (*with perturbation*).

Go! Miss Elrington shall

(*He breaks off, and after a pause, adds with forced calmness.*)
Pray depart.

MRS. ATHERLY.

Ha!

(*She gazes intently upon ELRINGTON, who rises and becomes every moment more and more dreadfully agitated.*)

ELRINGTON (*in flurried accents, as if in a violent struggle with his terrors.*)

There shall be no mischief:

None, good woman!

Only begone! *at once!* Do you hear?

'Tis pain

For me to speak, a very death—

At once!—

(*ELRINGTON turns away his head, but MRS. ATHERLY follows with nervous excitation.*)

MRS. ATHERLY (*with her face peering close in the face of ELRINGTON; her eyes intently searching his features.*)

Can it be? No! Yet, yes!

Amazing Heaven!

Why turn from me? For love of God, speak to me?

Me, *your own wife!*

(*The whole frame of ELRINGTON is shaken by an instantaneous convulsion, and he staggers to the chair.*)

ELRINGTON (*in a fearful hollow voice.*)

You know me *not!*

MRS. ATHERLY.

I have found thee

And if I lose thee now, whole Heaven shall curse thee.

ELRINGTON.

Avaunt! I am not your husband!

(*She is about to embrace ELRINGTON, who, moving on one side, she sinks on the floor.*)

MRS. ATHERLY (*in a convulsed broken voice as she falls.*)

ATHERLY!

Re-enter NOEL.

(*She swoons away.*)

NOEL.

Each outlet locked.

Who's she lies prostrate? Ha!

(Suddenly rushing to MRS. ATHERLY.)

My mother? Dear! Insensible!

ELRINGTON.

His mother!

(NOEL kneels on one knee; he raises MRS. ATHERLY'S head on the other. ELRINGTON, trembling, leans over his chair, and hiding his countenance on the morocco cushion, faintly shrieks out.)

Bear her,—your mother—hence!

(The scene closes.)

END OF ACT THIRD.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

Bank of the Thames at Lambeth. Terrace along the water side. Pleasure barge with watermen moored off the stairs. Several cross the stage with trunks and portmanteaus which they deposit in the barge.

Enter NOEL.

Oh, savage death ! What woe incited thee,
When I conveyed my mother senseless home,
Last eve, to signalize thy dread approach
Within her tearless eyes ;—the cold dull gleam
Of mortal sickness hastening to decay ?

(After a pause.)

It seems she owns some power to enforce her will,
That Elrington,—not *Elrington*, but Plumworth.
The impostor's name,—abscond not. *What's to her !*
Her influence whence ? I asked, but she—

Be hushed

My struggling spirit ! He is here ! Be hushed !
As clouds in their expansion for a while
Suspend their horrors ere they burst in storms.

Enter ELRINGTON (haggard and ghostlike, leaning upon a servant, whom, perceiving NOEL, he motions away, and tottering comes forward).

ELRINGTON *(apart)*.

My son ! Can she have told him ? No time this
To throw myself upon his neck. I'll make

A fountain of my grief when I have fled
 The land, and drown in tears my unnatural sin,
 To have lived aloof, as I had shuffled off
 The ties of blood . . . A man without a conscience ;
(He pauses, casting an inquiring look towards NOEL.)
 He knows not I am his father.

I must use
 The speed of light.
 To linger here were mortal,
 I'll hide from him the elusive cruise I purpose.
(To NOEL.)
 I'm off for . . . Hardfist's.

NOEL *(presenting a letter).*
 From my mother, sir.

ELRINGTON *(turning away in a hollow voice).*
 It is decreed ! There's more to bear !
 Air's hushed,
 And, sensible of this dread hour, the clouds
 At once stand still, as if some angry power
 Were talking. *(To NOEL.)*

Pray that note. *(Aside.)*
 Too busy fears !
 Since ye ride swifter than the silent skies,
 Let's know the bottom ! *(Looking up wildly to NOEL.)*
 Reach it, gentle sir.
(Receives the letter.)

(In a softened tone.)
 A goodly form ! I thank you kindly, Noel.
(ELRINGTON moves away.)

NOEL *(aside and startled).*
 His eyes dropt honey. Thousand frantic spirits,
 Seething like rising bubbles, on me glowed
 From the moist brink. *Why* must he speak to me

With thrilling voice, whose soul he hath miserably
Put out of tune ?

ELRINGTON (*apart, reading the letter*).

“ Not quit the land.”

(*In the deep accents of despair.*)

Winds waft me

To some far isle, where ne’er was seen fell print
Of human feet, o’ergrown with weeds !

There sink me,

Where neither man nor memory may find me.

Nor she—my wife !

Infatuate loiterer !

Fate hath in vain unclasped her iron gripe
To set thee free, since thou must counteract
Thy safety ! Oh ! were yesterday to come !

(*Rekurs to the perusal of the letter.*)

“ Abscond not Atherly ere I have speech,”
“ Or anger ”—“ Dying woman ”—“ If again
Your coward guilt lead to ignoble flight,
I will set justice on your trail.”

(*He crushes the letter ; then in a voice of affected
composure.*)

I will in,

And wait my arrest.

(*Totters a short distance, and stops short.*)

Soul, be not rash !

Withstand

This thunder calmly.

(*After a pause.*) Since thus spell-bound here,
Face troubles will bear question.

Eva wed,

Within an hour I have elbow-room to brave
The light as Plumworth ; when no way their doubts
Can more indamage me, *or if* . . . I stand
Desperate of better course. Slight *pigmy fears*

Can find no entrance, while a *giant terror*
Sits at my heart; though but a shade.

What eyes,

Save *hers*, might pierce my waning?

(*He approaches NOEL, to whom, aloud, in a faint hurried voice—*)

There's a trifle

Wherein would you oblige me, past your hopes
Thou meet'st reward.

NOEL (*with sarcastic bitterness*).

Another forgery?

ELRINGTON (*with a scream of horror*).

Canst thou not speak without that word?

I like not

Your thoughts!

(*On repeating these words, ELRINGTON is seized with a convulsive shuddering, which, though strongly counteracted, has terrible significance in it.*)

NOEL (*bitterly*).

I only mean I'd aid your signing

Plumworth, or Elrington, or what you will,—

Might I presume, without offence.

ELRINGTON (*recovering*).

That's not it.

(*After a pause.*)

You've heard my daughter will, within an hour

Be joined in holy wedlock to Lord Finmore?

NOEL (*starting*).

Earl Bridgeton hath inhibited his chaplain.

ELRINGTON.

That matters not. The parish minister

Will celebrate the rites in Lambeth church.

NOEL.

Thanks Fortune! But for this so timely news

My purposed will were frustrate.

ELRINGTON.

Be thou present
At the solemnity, and, having spoken,
The priest, the binding words,—

NOEL (*constraining a sullen smile*).

Oh! I'll be present

ELRINGTON.

This ring you'll please to bear—

(*Taking from his finger a ring, which falls on the
ground.*)

My hands hold nothing.

NOEL (*raising the ring*).

What shall I with it?

ELRINGTON.

Then deliver it

To Lady Finmore. Add that I'm at Hardfist's.
But swear! That emblem of eternity
Hath private import.

NOEL (*aside*).

I will take precaution

No priest pronounce those words, and thus make way
To my revenge, which shall disperse itself
On all.

(*Aloud, bitterly.*)

I swear whate'er you will shape for me!

(*NOEL is leaving, but stays behind on a sign from*

ELRINGTON.)

ELRINGTON (*aside*).

How all the father would o'erflow my nature,
But that I aim, by begging my heart,
To fortify my head.

(*Aloud, in a voice of tenderness.*)

I pray, your arm!

I faltering tread the prone descent of years.

NOEL.

A too unworthy worm ! but as you please !

ELRINGTON (*taking the arm of NOEL*).

I am your debtor.

Did I drown your breast
In floods, you 'd think the empress of my soul,
Reason, deposed from her high throne.

I know not !—

Things make me wild.

(*Pauses, and looks at NOEL with intense interest.*)

Dear Noel !

(*Here ELRINGTON is about to embrace his son ; but putting a violent restraint upon his inclination, he draws back.*)

(*Groaning deeply.*)

Heavenly powers !

Let me go mad, or die !

[*Exeunt towards the river.*]

SCENE II.

Interior of Lambeth Church : LORD FINMORE, EVA, LADY CLARISSA, and others assembled.

LORD FINMORE.

Till the church has done her part, an hour 's an age !
Methought . . . but sure 't was fancy . . . as I whispered
Of bliss and love, an ague thrill'd thy veins,—

Crystals, like tears, shaded your eyes' soft lustre,
And, starting back, you groaned !

EVA.

I feel so giddy.

'T will leave me. See, I smile !

LADY CLARISSA.

Sweet schoolmate, cheerly !

You 'll lose your bridal, answer you so low !

EVA (*aside*).

Would it were possible ! The will of Heaven,
Not mine, is fix'd on me !

LORD FINMORE.

What joy I carry

In thoughts of . . . but the priest hath lead in 's heels !

They should be quicksilver ! I tread on thorns,

Lest, now my bride stands ready, like a star,

To gild my state, my father eclipse all.

*Enter NOEL, disguised as a clergyman. He contrives to
conceal his countenance partly in his clerical vestments,
and partly in his handkerchief.*

Be quick, grave sir !

NOEL.

That nuptial whereunto

The parents be not bidden 's held unblessed.

Knows he of this, Earl Bridgeton ?

LORD FINMORE.

Reverend sir,

His absence can concern you not.

NOEL.

No contract

Then here ensues.

LORD FINMORE.

Hast come to mock us, mummer ?

NOEL.

To foil a match would cover you with shame,
 Black as the tongue of infamy could throw
 Upon your family. So deep a poison,
 Not all your noble blood could purify !

LORD FINMORE.

Now, by the power you serve ! but for your cloth,
 Along that marble slab I'd lay you flat !—
 Flat as your shadow !

NOEL.

Rather than my vesture
 Be an hindrance, my lord, I will uncase me.
 (NOEL *throwing aside his disguise, discovers himself.*)

EVA.

How my heart beats ! but 't is not grief I feel.

LORD FINMORE (*after a pause of surprise*).

I wrote to bid you 'void approaching me,
 As you prized life.

(*Feeling for his sword.*)

That I had brought my sword !
 And yet 't is not for such as thee ! Your baseness
 Be your protection !

NOEL (*indignantly*).

Are you privileged,
 The laws which gild your insignificance
 To violate in blood ?

You mispresume,
 To hold such tone to me. Art braver, stronger,
 Than him who checks your arrogance ?

Your thoughts,

Do you strive to erect them 'bove the strain of flesh,
 In science, or in arts ? Or dost o'erbear,
 Because you are, forsooth, a spangled lord,
 Howe'er beneath the title of a man ?

LORD FINMORE.

Vile dog ! Thus only can I deign chastise
Your insolence.

(LORD FINMORE *raising his arm, rushes at NOEL, who, intercepting the blow, with a laugh of scornful derision, dashes him to the ground.*)

NOEL.

Poor despot ! To the dust !
Which, didst know all, I tell you, you 'd prefer
To embrace to her alliance.

LORD FINMORE (*rising*).

I will find,

Scoundrel, a time hereafter.

LADY CLARISSA (*apart to NOEL*).

Why pursue

This course ?

NOEL (*sternly*).

To bring the infamy inflicted
On *my* head home unto herself.

LADY CLARISSA.

Oh ! lay not

Snares to enmesh her father out of vengeance.
See where in grief, all pale as she were dead,
Through her loose tresses' shade, her countenance
Gleams like a sickly moon.

NOEL (*scornfully*).

A vampire, that

Doth suck the juice of hearts !

LADY CLARISSA (*aside*).

To exonerate her

I'll instantly avow,—No ! He'll abhor me.

NOEL.

But I've o'erpeer'd revenge.

LADY CLARISSA (*aside*).

'Twere sin we have
No name for not to scale his eyes. I'll point
His hate aright, though it mark me for the grave.
(*Aloud, but in a faint voice.*)
Your spleen starts wide.

NOEL.

I intercepted hither
On his way, the clergyman !

LORD FINMORE.

Oh ! I'll requite you !

NOEL.

Upon my solemn word, that your bride's father
Assumed a station and a name illusive,
He doff'd his sacred gown, and left these precincts.

LORD FINMORE.

Unmeasured perjurer !

NOEL.

A rack is nigh
Will enforce you to believe ;—the lady's self !
Demand of *her* if she be not deception ?
Ask her, her father's appellation, calling ?

LORD FINMORE (*imploringly*).

Eva, a look ! There needs no language, none.
In your *eyes* only I seek full reply
To his foul attaint. But blush like truth.

NOEL (*pointing to EVA*).

(*To LORD FINMORE.*)

Thy answer !

She's pale as the hoar leprosy.

LORD FINMORE (to EVA).

Then dearest,—

(*He pauses, but after looking at her for a while with intense anxiety, resumes in uncontrollable vehemence of tone.*)

Oh, speak ! for now my passions wait thy voice.
Tell him, he but deludes our ears with lies
Which hell itself suggests.

NOEL (to EVA).

Bethink thee ere

Thou ope thy lips ! (*A pause.*)

(*Scornfully.*) I hear no word.

(*After a pause.*) Her father

Stands charged with felony.

EVA (*rushing up to NOEL.*)

Hush !

I freeze with fear.

NOEL (*aside.*)

That was a cup of gall !

(*Aloud, in bitter accents.*)

Oh, conscious guilt !

You can feel in *your* turn can you ?

I 'll let pass

No advantage in my vengeance.

(*To LORD FINMORE.*) Some such question

Her sire must answer soon.

LORD FINMORE.

He'll choke thy breath !

Thou ! I cannot express thee. What dare'st mutter ?

NOEL (*with bitter irony.*)

I care not for the word. If 't like you better,—

THEFT !

LORD FINMORE.

Vile aspersion !

NOEL (*to EVA*.)

To supply a theme
To your full content, there may arise a doubt
Of FORGERY.

LORD FINMORE.

Slander! To appease the maw
O' the wolf of hatred snarling in your breast.

NOEL (*with bitter emphasis*).

I have cause!

(*After a pause.*) But 'tis not slander. Eyes and ears
Can certify you 'tis the fact.

LORD FINMORE (*aside*).

Some complot . . .

Confederacy.

NOEL (*to EVA*).

My ruins come not alone.
Your heart's wrung too.

Your match is spoiled.

EVA.

I never

Harmed you.

LADY CLARISSA (*beseechingly as NOEL is leaving*).

This rancour let me conjure down.
Expunge your anger from your soul:
She is guiltless.
If grief and penitent tears can aught atone

NOEL (*sternly*).

Guiltless! My anger's just!—And on a rock,
Which neither tears can soften, nor the gusts
Of passion move, my treasured vengeance stands.
Pardon!

(*To LORD FINMORE.*)

This minute you can sift at Hardfist's,
The imposture out.

Exit NOEL.

(*Intemperate passion stifles LORD FINMORE'S voice.*)

LADY CLARISSA (*aside*).

I spoke an oracle,
She has lost her wedding.
Spite of fears and scruples,
I 'll clear all yet ; but, in a silken thread,
A knot requires a wary touch to loose it.

EVA (*musings*).

He can be in no trouble, or he had sent
His ring.

LORD FINMORE.

I hoped to have lived upon those lips
Ere now. What says my love ?

EVA.

In evil strait
He stands. You 'll aid him ?

LORD FINMORE

Is there evil strait ?

Rather than thus !

(*Walks perturbedly to and fro, then returning to EVA.*)

First !—Does your sire usurp
A false position ?

EVA (*trembling*).

I . . I cannot say.

LORD FINMORE (*fixing his eyes steadfastly on EVA*).
Not say ?

EVA.

Accept my tears for words. My heart
Is gored to the quick.

LADY CLARISSA.

We had best retire, to call
A counsel of our thoughts.

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(*As EVA is making her exit supported by LADY CLARISSA.*)

LORD FINMORE (*interposing*).

(*To EVA.*) Refrain thy steps!

Answer!

Your father, does he personate
Some other?

Is your name a name for the nonce?

EVA (*stopping short at the door*).

My full heart chokes my voice.

(*To LADY CLARISSA.*) Oh, bear me hence!

LORD FINMORE.

Then turn my steps for this discovering inquest,
At Hardfist's!

(*Lord Finmore stamps and is hurrying from the stage.*)

LADY CLARISSA (*laying her hand on the arm of LORD FIN-*
MORE).

Pause! be calm!

LORD FINMORE (*in a violent tone as he rushes past them*).

Teach cataract

To creep! The truth, though it blast me from the earth.

[*Exeunt, followed by Attendants.*]

SCENE III.

Counting-house of HARDFIST. EARL BRIDGETON seated. HARDFIST and the Jew lapidary, NATHAN, standing near.

EARL BRIDGETON.

He has kept himself perdu so long, I scarcely
Expect to obtain the sight of such a fellow
As Elrington, for nothing.

You have brought
The gem?

HARDFIST.

My lord, my Hebrew friend here hath it.
Nathan, convinced it is the same?

NATHAN.

I sold
For Plumworth? Oh, there is no doubt of it.
At the first beam I welcomed my white beauty.
You can say, if your lordship please, I told you so.

EARL.

Go to; what I will say until I say it,
None but myself shall know. I have in pickle
Signed ready, cut and dried, a warrant for him.

NATHAN.

My lord, he may account

EARL.

Experienced age
Is still provided. Note I'll take the wind,
And scent out larceny. I did not practice

At the bar for nought. Troth we could read an eye,
Though it spake in darkest characters, and can,
To our further honour still.

(Enter Usher in an abrupt, disturbed manner.)

USHER.

The Earl of Bridgeton ?

EARL.

To our honour still. What means this breathless haste ?

USHER.

My lord, I fear too late, albeit your wisdom

EARL.

If it rest in my capacity, content you.
Speak forth.

USHER.

No hope of a gratuity
'T was brought me hither ; I appeal to yonder
Sun, moon, and all the stars.

EARL.

The man protests
'Fore God quite passionately.

USHER.

Yet, my lord,
Service is no inheritance, I trow.

EARL (*aside*).

A very worthy fellow, I can see,
And hath the genius of king's counsel in him.
Such natures thrive : money seems coin'd to give them ;
Albeit its main use is to fee quick pleaders.
I made them buy my quiddits and my silence.
Yea, every drop of ink upon my brief,
Letter and tittle, comma, syllable,
My clients paid for with full hand ; or else
By the omitting of a particle,

I troubled their conveyance, raised a suit
At law, would last them until doomsday.

(*Aloud.*) Here!

A guinea, to our further honour!

USHER.

I

Am vowed, your lordship's creature.

You must know,

You are being gulled.

EARL.

What, I? A good joke! Ha!

I'll have you horsewhipped. I being gulled? Go to!

USHER.

Lord Finmore even now, by holy licence——

EARL.

Death o' discretion! Have I been slumbering?
Why, I wrote myself express to the reverend chaplain,
By Noel Atherly, to countermand . . .
Have I been dreaming?

USHER.

He has fee'd the parson,

To yield him in the parish church his function.

EARL.

Married! Say ruin'd, lost, and curst! but I
Will cross their huddled love rites.

USHER.

I am afraid . . .

EARL.

Reply is needless.

USHER.

At the door a coach——

EARL.

I'll fly—My son hath urged . . . I needs must own,
He'll do whate'er he lists, in spite of me,—

To my honour still ! The parson of the parish ?
 I'll have his surplice . . . What 's this wig unwise ?
 Experience nought ? . . .

(*As EARL BRIDGETON is hurrying off the stage.*)

Enter ELRINGTON.

(*His meeting with EARL BRIDGETON is unavoidable.—
 They front one another.—Their eyes encounter ; both
 start back.—ELRINGTON staggers ; his whole frame
 appears shaken by an instantaneous convulsion.*)

EARL (*struck and agitated*).

(*Fixing his eyes upon ELRINGTON.*)

Somewhere I've seen his face—
 Those eyes, red, quick, and wandering, fierce with fear,
 Remark him. Come this way. You shiver, sir,
 As your limbs were shocked to palsy. *We have met ?*

USHER.

My lord, 't is Mr. Elrington.

EARL (*with a long whistle*).

Is who ?

He is folding up, as if internal light
 Glared on some thought, close shrouded in his soul,
 He'd fain keep hid. (*After a pause of scrutiny.*)

No earthly man but one !

(*The heart of ELRINGTON knocks audibly against his
 ribs ; his bosom heaves ; and he gasps and pants for
 breath.*)

EARL (*after a few steps pauses, and in a low voice aside to
 ELRINGTON*).

Hark, in your ear !—*Were you ever tried for . . .*

(*ELRINGTON tosses both his hands to heaven : he gibbers
 with quivering lips and rueful motion of the head,
 standing haggard, ghost-like, and petrified.*)

EARL (*whistling*).

Whe-ew-ewh!

'T is so! 'T is so! Air, features, manner, silence!
You are his corpse!

(*Aloud to HARDFIST.*) Keep safe that stone. It sheds
Light pales the moonbeam. We have wit!

(*Aside.*) No time

For a fresh warrant. That fallacious bride
My son will mate with! and my generous blood
With his base puddle taint.

(*To the Usher.*) This way;—to our honour!

[*Exeunt* EARL BRIDGETON and *Usher*.]

(ELRINGTON *continues transfixed in horror.*)

(HARDFIST *approaches him.*)

HARDFIST (*with a slight bow*).

Sir, Mr. Elrington,

(*After a pause.*) You have put to sale
A jewel was Plumworth's, who, 'mid human haunts,
Suddenly left no trace,—wilt please to render
Of whom that precious gem?

(ELRINGTON *makes a sign as if unable to speak, then
sinking, half supported by HARDFIST, into a chair,
with a feeble voice.*)

ELRINGTON.

My answer is——

(*Stopping and looking bewildered.*)

I know not what it is.

Sir, presently.

(*He hides his face with his hands.*)

HARDFIST.

Thou need'st assistance.

ELRINGTON (*uncovering his face, after struggling for utterance*).

'Tis but an access

Takes me at times, resulting from a care
Which struggles here, subdued me.

Give me leave—

What wast you spoke relating to . . .

(*His voice dies away.*)

HARDFIST (*taking diamond from NATHAN*).

This gem,

How came it yours ?

ELRINGTON.

By purchase, sir, from Plumworth.

HARDFIST.

Give us some lively instance that 's the fact.

ELRINGTON.

I have his note about me. 'T will clear all.

(*He fumbles in his pocket, but soon relaxes in his research, and looks around him bewildered. Presently starting from his seat with a gesture of despair.*)

(*Aside.*)

Oh ! ill-starred wretch ! Of all men to encounter
Him, my soul quails to knowledge !

'Neath contempt !

Not to have hushed my genius up, that threw me
In this cursed land upon my fate. Foolbold !
To venture forth in garish day !

There 's time

To take my flight,—and off the Tower my vessel.
Ere this far hence she had turned her hastening prow,
But for my wife, whose ban falls powerless now.
Oh ! once on board !

(ELRINGTON *renews his search for the receipt.*)

(*Aloud.*) Not here? How feeble am I!

I'm full of years, and long disease hath worn me.

I shall find it, give me time. So!

(*Producing receipt.*) Con it o'er.

One hundred twenty thousand guineas down,

A pebble cheaply rated.

(HARDFIST *takes the paper, reads and examines it, then hands it to NATHAN.*)

HARDFIST.

Lapidary,

You know the hand of Plumworth.

NATHAN (*examining the receipt.*)

Hey, methinks

It is his signature, no doubt. Yes, yes.

(*To ELRINGTON.*)

Sir, we regret, from your seclusion, that . . .

ELRINGTON (*breaking in impatiently.*)

Spare your apologies—

(*Eagerly.*) May I depart?

NATHAN.

Certainly, sir.

(ELRINGTON *proceeds, but with difficulty, towards the door.*)

NATHAN (*to HARDFIST.*)

The document is correct?

(HARDFIST *receives the receipt, and scrutinizes the writing closely for some time without taking his eyes from the paper.*)

HARDFIST (*aside.*)

What wast that Noel Atherly bade me note?

I can detect no trace of any error.

What post-mark have we here?

(*Peering into the paper.*) By Heavens!

(*To ELRINGTON.*) Back!

A palpable fabrication!

(ELRINGTON *stops short at the door in horror.*)

NATHAN.

Forgery?

(*At the word FORGERY, ELRINGTON is seized with a fit of trembling.*)

HARDFIST (*to NATHAN*).

Here in the midst the London post-mark!

See you?

The first of June, this current year, o'er which
The ante-date of Lisbon, January,
A lie upon the face of 't! If this be
The signature of Plumworth, Plumworth lived
Within this week—if not, his name is forged.

NATHAN (*to ELRINGTON*).

You 'll please elucidate?

ELRINGTON (*terror and a desire to retain his self-possession strongly contending in his countenance and feeble voice.*)

My breath comes short.

I wished to have kept secret . . . I, myself,
Am truly Plumworth.

HARDFIST (*shaking his head*).

To beguile our ears,

Think on a likelier fiction.

(*While HARDFIST is conferring apart with NATHAN.*)

ELRINGTON (*in great agitation*).

Yet my ring!

But, ah! the fraudulent moments ply their wings.
Child, hurry!

Enter LORD FINMORE.

(ELRINGTON *totters up to LORD FINMORE.*)

ELRINGTON.

May I bid you joy? Say yes!
Strike from the edge of care a spark of gladness.

LORD FINMORE (*regarding him attentively*).
Too wild and frightful!

I've not wed thy daughter.

(*The arms of ELRINGTON fall, and his whole deportment and disconsolate action denote the excess of his disappointment.*)

LORD FINMORE.

No moment this to stand on ceremony.

Who art thou, sir? (*Pauses.*)

The name you bear, is't feigned?

(*Another pause, during which LORD FINMORE looks steadfastly on the guilt-stricken visage of ELRINGTON.*)

I'm blasted in his silence! We are severed,
Eva and . . . Yet she implored with tears that I . . .

(LORD FINMORE *turns, and addresses himself to*
HARDFIST.)

ELRINGTON (*apart, solemnly*).

Blind Reason! what's thy use, the airy veil,
Which from my eyes concealed the path of ruin,
Not to pierce through, nor canst repel this storm.
Hence be thou driven from my inmost soul,
And give place to distraction!

Enter NOEL, with Usher behind.

LORD FINMORE (*to HARDFIST*).

(NOEL *overhearing.*)

Give me hearing,—

I'll shortly prove to you that gentleman's honour
Will, with the force of the meridian beam,
Start from this passing cloud.

HARDFIST.

But step this way.

(HARDFIST *respectfully motions LORD FINMORE to confer with him and NATHAN apart. He retires up the stage with them.*)

(NOEL comes forward.)

NOEL (*to Usher*).

A warrant of Earl Bridgeton? Then bring hither
The officers without.

USHER.

The service will

Be recompensed.

[*Exit Usher.*]

(NOEL advances near ELRINGTON.)

ELRINGTON.

How act? On Beloe's breath,
Comes no releasement from this edge of hazard,
Projecting horror!

(*Looks round him with anxious suspicion, but without
perceiving NOEL, who is just behind him.*)

Driven to the brink,
To take the leap of utter desperation
Is the best prudence. Now!—one rapid moment!

(*As ELRINGTON is in the act of slipping out, NOEL
detains him by the arm.*)

ELRINGTON (*eagerly*).

So banish all despair! You've come to impress
On my dark cloud an iris, and have borne
My ring to Eva . . .

NOEL (*interrupting*).

At your 'hest I swore

To give it, *Lady Finmore*.

ELRINGTON (*fixing his eyes on NOEL, with every mark
of horror and despair*).

Power of Justice!
Must the deep phial of thy wrath be poured
Upon my head from him?

(*LORD FINMORE and HARDFIST come forward.*)

LORD FINMORE (*to ELRINGTON*).

It is permitted,
That you depart without more questioning.

ELRINGTON (*hurriedly*).

Small time for thanks—the pressing exigence
Forbids. My ship in readiness . . .

HARDFIST (*indicating a door at the back.*)

Few steps
To the river, 'gainst whose margin boats recline.

ELRINGTON (*in an exulting but feeble voice*).

Already have I passed the interspace,
And safely in my cabin lodged, I——

NOEL (*as ELRINGTON reaches the door*).

Halt !

(*ELRINGTON stands torpid in suspense*).

I have taken order for you.

Re-enter Usher with officers through an opposite door.

NOEL (*pointing to ELRINGTON*).

Lo ! your man.

Seize on him !

ELRINGTON (*in extreme agitation*).

Let me hence ! On what pretence ?

NOEL.

Without apparent right, being found possessed
Of——

ELRINGTON (*interrupting with hasty iteration*).

What's mine own . . . Impede me not !

I am Plumworth !

NOEL (*sneeringly*).

How can *that* be ? Thou art ? Would you say that ?
'T is as it proves : None here will swear to you.

(NOEL *changing the tone of his countenance from a derisive sneer to something more intently contemptuous.*)

Your word's no gospel.

ELRINGTON (*aside in a voice of utter despair*).

Lost!—am I awake?

NOEL (*fiercely*).

From thy flagitious dream for ever!

(*The countenance of ELRINGTON falls; the muscles of his face tremble with agony, and he looks the statue of despair.*)

ELRINGTON.

Ha!

Give breath!

NOEL (*tauntingly to LORD FINMORE*).

You hear! an honourable alliance!

LORD FINMORE (*with a menacing look*).

Officious meddler! when next we meet!

(LORD FINMORE *rushes out*.)

ELRINGTON (*to Officer*).

A word to this young man, ere you conduct me
To the dread place where—

(*Stops short, shuddering: then in a hurried voice.*)

Whither you will!

(ELRINGTON *comes forward with NOEL*.)

(*To NOEL apart in a solemn voice.*)

You've made

Fine work; but it may help to allay your triumph,
To learn, in trapping me into this toil,
You have delivered to the law *the being*—

NOEL (*at once divining the truth*).

Stay there! The fierce truth dawns!

ELRINGTON.

Unto the gallows

Sent him who . . .

NOEL.

Ha! Light flashes through my error.

(ELRINGTON'S voice falters; presently finding speech.)
(Solemnly.) So tell your mother!

(ELRINGTON turns away, and is leaving.)

(NOEL, following, interposes.)

NOEL (breathlessly).

Who art? My blood stands still.

I only live to hear. (ELRINGTON stops short.)

ELRINGTON (after wiping the terrible moisture on his face
and forehead with his handkerchief).

Why, let it burst

On thee!—My name is—(pauses in dreadful agitation.)

NOEL (gaspingly).

Out with 't, though it blast me!

ELRINGTON (drawing back and raising his arms).

Know then in thunder,—I am Atherly!

ATHERLY, YOUR FATHER!

(NOEL sinks down at ELRINGTON'S feet, as if struck by
lightning.)

(ELRINGTON motions to the Officers, who lead him out, fol-
lowed by Usher, Nathan, &c.)

(HARDFIST approaching NOEL).

HARDFIST.

Is the man distraught?

NOEL (recovering, rises, in a hollow voice).

No—Thunder had not struck so deep!—

My mother,

Why did 'st keep back this secret?

(After a pause.) It is fixed!

'Tis done!

Which way soe'er I turn, dishonour

Uprears her hideous front!

Ye devils! Rack me!

Your pangs are nothing,—I have wrought a deed
No tortures can atone!—have headlong pushed,
Standing upon the grave's last edge, a father!
Parricide! No method to undo the ruin?

(After a pause of thought.)

Ha! Yet there is a chance. That ring?

To Lambeth!

(Going out, he stops short.)

But first to embrace my mother. Well for her
Her thread of life unwinds. In all her functions,
Outworn with age, droops nature. Last she cannot.
Then Eva Elrington—May Heaven direct thee!

[Exit NOEL, hurriedly.]

(HARDFIST gazes after him amazed.)

END OF ACT FOURTH.

ACT V.

SCENE I.

*Apartment in ELRINGTON'S house at Lambeth. Same as
Scene II. of Act II. Desk upon the table.*

EVA (*discovered*).

How slow and awful are these trying minutes
Of hideous doubt, where, brooding in the air,
Sits haggard shame! Avaunt, detested slander!
Fatal assumption, this false name!

What terror

Thrills through my nerves, so far beyond the occasion?
Since, moved to pity by my tears, Earl Bridgeton
Is pledged to save my father.

Enter NOEL.

*(On his cheek health seems to wither; over his sight the
shivering eyelids close.)*

Spleenful being!

Is not his rancour satiate? He comes on
With downcast eyes and pale, in such slow time,
A corpse going to the grave looks not more deadly.

NOEL (*aside*).

I could stand mute for ever! Numbed my heart;
Or it could not contain the grief it holds.

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My mother ! Thou art colder still ! The world
Is all a blank.

*(With sudden recollection, while a creeping tremor over-
spreads his fading lips.)*

*In prison ? There ! My blood
Bursts through my veins, as, from its icy bonds,
By the quick sunstroke freed. What brings me here ?
(He raises his hand to his brow, and after a pause of hesita-
tion approaches EVA.)*

*(Aloud.) Knowest thou this hoop of gold ?
(Shows the ring.)*

EVA.

It wakes a fear

My nature shrinks at.

What detains my father ?

(NOEL averts his head.)

Ah ! then of him thou bringest some sad news ?

NOEL *(aside)*.

I cannot tell her what.

EVA *(with mild eyes, dejected, and cheek o'ercast with fear)*.

How apprehension

Chokes up my vital spirits !

NOEL.

You will hear

At Hardfist's.

Act without a moment's doubt,

As this instructs. *(Gives the ring.)*

The rest your father paused,

But held it in.

EVA *(aside)*.

I may not hesitate

To prosecute the means of his deliverance.

NOEL.

Thy errand was imposed on thee with speed.

EVA.

Far from me now timidity ! I seek
My father's saviour.—Ah, how hot my cheek is !
My beating heart ! I do not know myself.
Beloe !

My part is the plain line of duty.

NOEL.

Time presses ! Safety wavers on his life,
Like down on thistle's beard.

Enter LADY CLARISSA.

EVA.

His life, do you say ?

At Hardfist's, sir ?

NOEL.

Oh ! use the speed of wings !

EVA.

I'll be there swift as thought.

[Exit EVA.]

*(As NOEL is leaving by the opposite door, he is met by
LADY CLARISSA.)*

LADY CLARISSA.

Dear friend, no word ?

NOEL.

I have a trouble at my heart. I pray thee.

LADY CLARISSA.

'Tis mine by rights, since we changed hearts . .

NOEL.

I told you

How undone a thing you honoured, yet o'errated
My poor condition. 'Tis enough ; believe me
Unworthy of you.

LADY CLARISSA.

If, being that I am,
I stoop from pride of rank, the fault is mine own,
And if it be reproach, *thou* mightst forgive it.

NOEL (*discovering a silent sorrow in the swelling of the eyes, the quivering of his lips and cheeks, and in the affecting distance of his behaviour*).

I am steeped in mourning. For me now to listen,
Were to defile the holiest dew of heaven
Ere it approach the earth— (*Pauses, and then in a convulsive voice, while his swimming eyes o'erflow anew.*)

My truest friend
Hath took eternal leave. Out on my tears !
But I did love my mother !

LADY CLARISSA.

Can you pardon
My too officious passion ?
(*Here LADY CLARISSA pauses, but presently collecting every power to charm, she diffuses an excess of sweet allurement, as she adds.*)

Only say
In a word, the day may come when friendship's ties
Shall like a sapphire set in gold, shine forth
With fairer title ?

NOEL.

I am far too sad
For aught save thanks. Command me as you will,
Hereafter.

LADY CLARISSA.

Well, hereafter. Farewell !
Stay !

I have had of this poor face a counterfeit
Limn'd, for thee to wear against thy heart,
In token our affections are contracted.

(NOEL bows.)

Ah me! where was 't I laid it?

I remember.

(LADY CLARISSA takes a key from her reticule, and approaching the desk, unlocks it. NOEL starts, raises the obliquely-gleaming eyeball, and watches her movements with symptoms of intense anxiety.)

NOEL (*apart*).

A dream! a horrid dream! what fancies wait

Upon our sleep! Ha! do I live and wake?

The desk! I'll shut my eyes:

It will not vanish!

(LADY CLARISSA proceeds to open the desk; she searches within: then, as if apparently her eyes had lit upon some unlooked-for object, she abruptly stops. She trembles, and casts a hurried furtive glance in the direction of NOEL.)

LADY CLARISSA (*aside*).

Oh, how forgetful! To leave here the copy.

(*Evidently embarrassed, she is about to close the desk in painful confusion: NOEL darts forward, and holds her by the wrist.*)

NOEL (*in a breathless voice*).

Tell me, I entreat,—this desk?

You would have closed it,—

Why did you wish to close it? Answer me,

Why, stricken all aghast, thy countenance fallen.

LADY CLARISSA (*in a pitiable state of agitation*).

Wherefore do you ask? The desk?

NOEL.

No iteration;

Is it not Eva Elrington's?

LADY CLARISSA (*in great agitation*).

Dear sir !

My powers have all forsaken me.

NOEL.

Whose is 't ?

My words are plain.

LADY CLARISSA (*in a broken voice*).

Look not so terribly.

The escritoire is mine.

NOEL.

Wherein thou hast hid

From the world's obloquy . . .

(*He sternly re-opens the desk, and taking therefrom a MS., holds it on high.*)

This scrawl ! Dost own it ?

(*LADY CLARISSA bursts into a flood of tears, and stands speechless and confounded.*)

Art thou the authoress here ?

(*After a pause.*) Thou coin'st some fable.

(*LADY CLARISSA remains mute, at length faintly she unlocks her faltering lips.*)

LADY CLARISSA.

You torture me.

NOEL.

Come quick !

LADY CLARISSA.

I fear. Oh, Noel !

Let me be silent still !

NOEL.

I make demand

Of thee, who wrote this ?

LADY CLARISSA (*in wild agony*),

How it chanced I know not.

But 't is most true.

NOEL.

You wrote it?

LADY CLARISSA.

No, my fiend!

NOEL (*indignantly*).

It cannot be! Or life's mere trick of cozenage;
For falsehood of this strange stupendous sort
Sets firm-eye'd Reason on a gaze.

Oh, heartless!

Let Eva Elrington, thy schoolmate, friend,
Incur foul stigma through *thy* viciousness?
By fallacy impell'd, I bruised her heart,
Blurr'd with imputed guilt her father's honour.
Thy conscience witnessed, but sent forth not one
Soul-piercing cry, *Forbear!* Assault on me,
The wafted dust upon the balance, weighed
With thy vile dumbness, which should turn thine heart
Into a shower of blood.

From this time forth,

One to another, beautiful Sin! we're strangers!

(*The colour which had been varying on LADY CLARISSA'S cheek during NOEL'S invective, now leaves it for a death-like pallor.*)

LADY CLARISSA (*wringing her hands*).

Bless me with deafness!

(*In accents of despair.*) Misery! I appeal
To Heaven's mind-inspecting eye! 'T was love
Enforced my silence, for I could not bear,
That thou shouldst think and know, I had reported
So slightly of thee. But thy father's lapse,
The allusion . . . it was foisted in.

I knew not

By my soul! . . .

NOEL (*interrupting*).

No more !

LADY CLARISSA (*in high-toned anguish*).

That I, that day engulfed,
Had perished !

NOEL (*sternly*).

Had been better !

LADY CLARISSA.

Why then save me ?

NOEL.

Nay—stay me not !

LADY CLARISSA (*kneeling*).

First kill me, if you please.

I will not writhe my body at the wound,
But sink upon your feet with a last sigh,
And ask remission with my dying hands.

*(She prostrates herself at his feet : her loosened tresses
fall over her shoulders : each accent freezes on her
faltering tongue.)*

(After a pause.)

Not yet unbent that lowering brow ?

Oh ! surely,

These dews of penitence should raise the seed
Of mercy.

NOEL.

In my passage, plant no longer
Thy endearments.

(NOEL disengages himself : LADY CLARISSA rises.)

LADY CLARISSA.

I will spare them. Tears nor torrents
Softens hearts of flint.

(Her voice suffocating with agony.)

Oh, God ! my tightened heart !

(As she staggers sinking into a chair.)

Enter LORD FINMORE.

LORD FINMORE *(to NOEL as he is leaving)*.

Stop!

NOEL.

I am in haste. What wouldst?

LORD FINMORE.

But one cold word,

You are a rascal!

NOEL.

Down heart!

LORD FINMORE.

First thou wormedst

The secret of poor Plumworth to betray it.

Pray, what concerned it thee, and what wast moved

Thy inquisition? When his daughter's hand . . .

Thou crossed'st us at the altar,

Last my sister!

Thy slime's o'er all! Thy serpent tortuous trail

Puzzles men's eyes, like his who fell apostate,

False and accursed, as thou art.

Tremble, slave!

NOEL *(calmly)*.

I do.

But think not, that thy threat'nings fright me.

No, 't is myself, I fear!

LORD FINMORE.

Deride my fury?

Then words are futile!

(Draws his sword.)

Feel my heart's true language!

(LORD FINMORE, with furious wildness, makes a pass at

NOEL with his drawn sword.)

LADY CLARISSA (*interposing*).

Menace my breast, not his! *My heart speaks too!*

(*The first thrust at NOEL is averted; but immediately LORD FINMORE grappling with him, he is wounded, and LORD FINMORE in the struggle, by accident, stabbed to death. LADY CLARISSA stands stupified.*)

LORD FINMORE (*as he falls*).

I'm baffled!

NOEL.

Slain? . . . I had cause to tremble!

(*Perceiving he himself is bleeding.*) Blood?

Not *his*! I'll seek my father, ere extends,
Oblivion, o'er our shame thy darkening veil!

[*Exit NOEL, with feeble steps.*]

Enter EARL BRIDGETON.

EARL (*approaching, and hanging over the body of LORD FINMORE*).

My son! Thou blossom of my house! Thy bosom
Pours fast the streams of life!

Deformed with murder!

Who hath done this?

CLARISSA (*throwing her arms around him*),

I'll whisper it. I saw

My brother's weapon writhed from his grasp—'t was Noel!
I hear his stabbing here . . . here in my brain!

EARL.

Ha! struck past help?

Thou canst not hear me vow

The hate that knows not mercy!

(LORD FINMORE *half rises: he endeavours to speak in vain: he raises his hand to Heaven and expires.*)

He revived

To ratify my vengeance.

Atherly?

LADY CLARISSA (*wildly*).

I cannot hide ; a power is on watch for justice.
Did I say Noel Atherly slew my brother ?

EARL.

Lady Clarissa, Noel Atherly,
Whose father, subtle earthworm, into wealth
Hath wriggled ; whom I meant to have preserved
From capital punishment, due by the law,
Since long ago condemned ; but with his son
He now shall

LADY CLARISSA (*whose look has the horrid calmness of
outbreathed despair*).

'T was no vision then, but firm,
Enduring truth that may not pass away.
Give back the heart was crushed e'en now to stone !

(*LADY CLARISSA sinks in her father's arms.*)

EARL.

He has killed her too !

But I will take such vengeance,
Exquisite ! Child, come on !

Attendants there !

Enter Attendants.

Bear my Lord Finmore's body to that couch.

(*Attendants carry off the body of LORD FINMORE,
followed by EARL BRIDGETON and LADY CLARISSA.*)

SCENE II.

Prison.

ELRINGTON *is discovered sitting in bending posture, with his clenched hands pressed upon his knees, and his eyes fixed upon the ground. He seems absorbed in the stupor of despair. After a pause, he speaks.*

ELRINGTON.

I'm left to bear mine agony, till justice
Tear me from out of time. Oh, God! I grow
Mad with this consummation of a life,
Made up of grey dissimulation, lies!
Soft!—'t is a dream! and I shall waken. Eva,
Come to my help, my love! My sleep is wrung
By frightful visions! Thanks!

See, I have clenched
My flesh; but, praise to Heaven! I am myself!
(*Pressing his temples tightly with both hands.*)

(*After a pause.*)

It was *no* dream! Upon my cheated eye
Light breaks. I am awake for ever! Oh,
The horrible reality! Where are ye?
Daughter, son, save me! Beloe! But a word
From him might set me free! My strength is gone!
I sink! My soul's beset! and the rank earth

(*ELRINGTON sinks upon the ground, and with his hands seems endeavouring to grasp the stone floor, as if to cling to it from some imaginary violence.*)

Whispers me of despair!

Enter NOEL.

NOEL.

In bitter groans

Who sounds his agonies !

ELRINGTON.

Congenial

To these foundations, riveted, I lie

Leave me then ! Leave me to my couch !

NOEL.

My charge

I have delivered.

ELRINGTON (*looking up wildly*).

I will not be stared at,

Hissed at, and shuddered at, and scorned.

N OEL.

I herald

Blessings of freedom, Life !

ELRINGTON (*eagerly*).

Of freedom ? Ha !

(*In gloomy abstraction.*)

Why heaves the loosened rock ? Yon bolts have erst
Been riven, and the winds have borne the captive
To the dark depths of safety . . Now some years ;
Thirty and more.

Down hideous thought ! Elude
The ears of watchful angels ! (*Pauses.*)

(*Suddenly recollecting himself, wild energy in his gestures,
and frenzy in his aspect.*)

Tell me something !

And bar the passes of my mind against
Returning dreams !

I shriek unto thy soul,—

Art—art thou my son Noel ?

NOEL.

I have given
That token to your daughter, who at hand
Brings testimony that

ELRINGTON (*rising from the ground*).
(*With exulting voice.*)

That gushes here,
Like the warm blood, and numbed with frost and horror,
My heart, at prospect of deliverance,
Breaks *thus ! thus ! thus !*

(*He weeps, and throws himself upon the breast of NOEL.*)

But *thou* art cold ?

NOEL (*coldly*).

As marble.

I pray, sir, be more guarded !

Blind men's eyes

Which judge but by what seems.

Eject no glance

To guide discovery to the dark abyss
Where our near tie lies hushed, like some close crime,
In dumb obscurity.

ELRINGTON.

I will write to thee

And to thy mother ; comfort her, and mention
Where I wear out in shadow of the grave
An old man's stock of days. You need not fear,
I will suffer grief to visit either of you
Again.

(*A slight hectic prevails over the paleness of NOEL's cheek.*)

NOEL.

We are obliged. There 's one firm friend
Wipes all sad tears away.

ELRINGTON.

I 'll send for her

I tell you.

NOEL.

He forbids, whose countenance
Shines on her soul.

She is smiling up the sky.

ELRINGTON.

(With a voice faltering and weak.)

Let me lean on thee, for methinks the floor
Is falling from me. Mean you she is no more?

(NOEL weeps.)

*(After a pause in which ELRINGTON seems absorbed in the
stupor of grief.)*

ELRINGTON.

Weep for the living! For a wretch like me
God ne'er before abandoned

NOEL *(tears choking his utterance).*

Joyous tears

Mine! for I am dying too; and we shall meet,
Like parted waves upon the quiet sea.

(After a pause.)

After your dread disclose I sought her couch;
She blessed us both, and one bright gleam of love,
Ineffable, contending with death's stroke,
Seized on her withered veins. Then praying your pardon
From Heaven, she dropt asleep; I gazed,—and sunk
My head upon her bosom,—cold—cold—cold!

ELRINGTON.

Her latest sigh breathed pardon!

Ill-starr'd wife!

Doom'd to deplore my everlasting absence!
Fatal the day on which we wed! Disjoined
For half our life-time! Ceaseless terror turning
Startled affection back, lest it should yield
My clue. Yet secret-working Fate ordained us,

At life's last verge to flash upon each other,
But for a lightning space !

(NOEL *presses his hand to his brow and appears lost in reverie and abstraction, leaning in a trance against the side scene.*)

Enter EVA with BELOE.

EVA (*rushing up to ELRINGTON and embracing him*).

Oh ! Dear, my father !

ELRINGTON.

I cannot bear this air : I want sea-breezes.
Bring Beloe—life—and time—Hath he—

(BELOE *comes forward.*)

BELOE.

Friend ! Plumworth !

ELRINGTON.

Beloe, I ill can look thee in the face,
My pride of fine manœuvring seared, and ground
To dust. I have kept no faith, but I am bereft,
And this nigh-finished being, desolate.
Friend, take me hence !

BELOE.

I opened to the judge
The facts, and bear the order of release :
Fulfilled your wish before you spoke.

ELRINGTON (*with intense emotion*).

What cleared ?

To float on the free waves from these abhorred
Heart palpitations ? (*After a pause.*)

Wert with all my treasure.
Endowed, too poor a payment !

BELOE.

Treasure? Keep
The word engaged for Elrington—this hand!
Requite me so. She is your treasure, *She!*

ELRINGTON.

You make me more your debtor.

BELOE.

Fairest Eve;
Life of my heart! Than life more dear! Wilt ratify
The gift?

EVA.

Oh, Beloe! On your noble mind,
And delicate, in hours of pain and peril
I might repose me firmly. Then retain
My hand for life.

BELOE.

And on it fix the seal
Of an eternal contract. (*Kisses her.*)

ELRINGTON.

My time of safety narrows. All adieu!
(*NOEL suddenly starting as from a trance, comes forward.*)

NOEL.

Lean, sir, on me.

ELRINGTON.

We have lost an age already.
The winds sport in my sails!
(*Takes the arm of NOEL.*)

But, ah, you stagger.

(*A deadly paleness steals upon NOEL's cheek: fatal dews
are on him: his trembling knees totter beneath their
burden.*)

Death's ensigns are upon thee!

Heavens! Explain!

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NOEL.

The wound is stanchèd ;

You hazard your retreat

By idle questionings.

ELRINGTON (*in a voice of intense affection*).

I love you, Noel !

NOEL (*in a low voice*).

Think what dire cause you have to shun your fellows.

Pray, let me draw you hence.

ELRINGTON.

Be swift as Onward !

But say, those stains ?

NOEL.

The moment on the wing

Brooks no delay.

E'en while I speak, we are lost.

(*With nervous affection, NOEL hurries the movements of ELRINGTON. They cross the stage : they reach a massive iron grating which extends across. As they are about to pass through the portal left ajar, the JAILOR suddenly presents himself, and raising his arms, with stern significant gestures, motions them back again. They stand a moment stupified.*)

ELRINGTON (*wild, breathless, distracted in his looks*).

Strike down that sullen harbinger of horror !

The inauspicious monster shocks my walk.

I'll swear, he is some ghost has left his haunt

To blab a drunken lie. Quick from my sight !

Swift as the lightning glance.

You've done your errand !

NOEL (*in a state of extreme excitement*).

Stand from our path ! Give way ! Your prisoner,

His warrant of committal is reversed.
This gentleman, Mr. Beloe, bore the order.

JAILOR.

Since when I have received a further charge,
That, whatsoever to the contrary
I may have heard, the party be detained.

ELRINGTON (*in great agitation*).

Wherefore? *For what* imprison me, the caption
Being founded on mistake?

(*After a pause, mingling a deathlike weakness and decay
with more than mortal energy and rage.*)

Wilt thou resolve me,
Or must I ask for ever? Speak, I charge you!
Nor let my own voice like an evil omen
Load the hot air unanswered.

JAILOR.

It is also
In my fresh orders, at my proper peril,
To keep you manacled.

Bring hither, Grimlock,
The irons! Do you hear?

Enter GRIMLOCK with manacles.

Secure that felon!

(*ELRINGTON'S heart throbs with unspeakable horror, and
his knees smite each other.*)

ELRINGTON (*in a hollow voice*).

I thought these dreams had left me. But there stalks
With pond'rous tread, a form of giant stature,
Its features reek with blood-drops!

Wake me thunder!

(*While GRIMLOCK is fastening the gives on him.*)

ELRINGTON (*in a voice of querulous harrowing agony*).

Why do you hold me back?

Great God! They bind me

With fetters!

(ELRINGTON *stands stunned and stupified.*)

EVA (*imploringly*).

Beloe! Speak! Sure hearts grow hard!

BELOE (*to Jailor*).

I brought a countermand. This gentleman
Was to be set at liberty, not enchained.

JAILOR.

Are you promoted here? Zounds, sirs, would make me
Remiss in mine office?

NOEL (*impetuously*).

Hideous office! Which

I will trample from thee!

JAILOR.

What a coil is here!

NOEL (*in a transport of agony and terror*).

(*To GRIMLOCK.*)

Loosen thy foul gripe! He is reprieved.

Thou shalt not!

Some dire mistake! Oh, burst my heart!

(*After a pause.*) *It bursts!*

(*The wound of NOEL bleeds afresh, and the blood spouts
over his garments: he sinks on the ground.*)

ELRINGTON (*with sudden recollection, wildly*).

He bleeds! It pours out! Mine! My own son's blood!
Oh, God! too late, I bless thee—now—at last!

NOEL (*in low sad accents*).

We were not born for blessings!

ELRINGTON (*wildly*).

Let me loose !

Hold me no longer ! On the rolling deck,
While whirlwinds sweep the surge, I'll take my stand.
I catch the roar of the wide-weltering waves !
The tide flows fair, and with a fore-right gale !
Weigh anchor ! Now give sea-room ! Keep our keel
Wide of the shore !

Blow every wind ! Blow storms !

BELOE (*to Jailor*).

I beg to hear what grounds you have for this ?

JAILOR (*sharply*).

What wouldst ?

(*After a pause.*) My lord belike will satisfy you.

Enter EARL BRIDGETON, *with* LADY CLARISSA *leaning*
on his arm.

(ELRINGTON *gives a loud shriek, and shrinks from the*
Earl with horror.)

ELRINGTON (*in the hollow accents of deprecation*).

Come not again ! Why are you here ? Begone !

Unfix thy baleful glance ! Take him away !

(*Cold drops, distilled from every pore of ELRINGTON,*
bedew his shivering flesh : ghastly pale his cheeks :
his knees yield to their burthen.)

EARL (*to NOEL*).

Slaughterer ! I thus avenge my Finmore's blood !

Thy father there—in brief—that prison-breaker !

I bear the warrant for his doom !

NOEL (*solemnly*).

And mine !

LADY CLARISSA (*approaching NOEL, and leaning over him*).
Not so !

NOEL.

The pale king points to me ; and his cold power
Creeps o'er my heart.

LADY CLARISSA.

Unsay it.

(*Clasping him.*) What, no motion ?
That inexpressive look ! Oh, fugitive life !
Drops its lost colours ! And thy fleeting soul . . .

NOEL (*half raising himself, in a deep solemn voice*).

'Tis doomsday there !

(NOEL drops down dead.)

(*As, fixed on the solemn sepulchre, some monumental form, choicest of beautiful things inanimate, inclines the head, so LADY CLARISSA hangs over NOEL's body, entranced by anguish.*)

LADY CLARISSA.

Death ! Have you not another
Billet for me to shoot the dark profound.
One tomb will serve, near that dear clay extended,
To transport both !

(LADY CLARISSA, grief-distracted, throws herself on the
body of NOEL.)

EARL (*endeavouring to raise her*).

Lady Clarissa Pompas,
For shame ! My only child that's left. Are all
My goodly growth of honours come to this ?

EVA (*to ELBRINGTON, whose eyes are fixed upon the ground*).

Look up ! 'Tis I, sir !

(ELRINGTON raises his eye to EVA, but it does not seem to acknowledge its object ; there is a glazing on it that deadens its look).

ELRINGTON (*distractedly*).

Lost in utter darkness !

Guide me, some friendly pilot, through the storm !

(ELRINGTON moves a few paces, till he suddenly fronts
EARL BRIDGETON.)

EARL (*haughtily*).

Hence, FORGERER ATHERLY !

(ELRINGTON starts back.)

ELRINGTON (*distractedly*).

Ha ! ha ! what say you ?

A strange noise in my head ! Oh, fly in pieces !

'Tis Sergeant Pompas ! How he knits his brows !

My terrors ! Hide me ! Save me from the shame !

Die for the stroke of a pen ?

Flat homicide !

My old brain splits !

Those lank and shrivelled hands

Paddling about my neck !

Dispatch me quick !

What's that ? To hang !—swing to the winds !

Spread sail !

Over the crimson billows ! Favouring gales

Now murmur, and, inviting, curl the deep !

Black o'er the furrowed main blow hurricanes !

(*He suddenly starts : his eyes fix. After some time he proceeds.*)

What tamed the restiff blast ? My lone sail flaps

As on a slumberous stronde. The silent sea

Her shivering surface parts!

Ah! Drops the world?

Whither, my soul?—What grand assize awaits thee?

Great Judge, *I plead me guilty!*

Mercy! mercy!

(ELRINGTON, *raving, falls dead into the arms of GRIMLOCK.*)

(EVA and BELOE *stand near, in attitudes expressive of their wretchedness.*)

(*The EARL, who has raised LADY CLARISSA on a stool near the body of NOEL, leans over her absorbed in grief.*)

The Curtain falls.

END OF "FORGERY."

SENSIBILITY.

A TRAGEDY,

In Five Acts.

RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED

TO

THE AUTHOR OF "THE HUNCHBACK."

Persons Represented.

LORD JULIAN	{	<i>The eldest grandson of THE DOWAGER, and the Abbot's nephew. In love with THERESA.</i>
LORD GERALD	{	<i>The Abbot of Widford; the surviving son of the DOWAGER LADY VERNON. The real EARL OF EASTHAM.</i>
LORD FRANCIS	{	<i>JULIAN's younger brother, and the Abbot's nephew.</i>
THE MARQUIS OF FITZ SIMPLE.		<i>A General in the Royal Service.</i>
WALTER		<i>A light-hearted yeoman.</i>
THE MERRIE MEN	{	<i>A club of lively young fellows; the elite of the neighbouring Yeomanry.</i>
THERESA	{	<i>Supposed to be the grand-daughter of THE DOWAGER, and supposed (in her own right) COUNTESS OF EASTHAM.</i>
THE DOWAGER LADY VERNON.		
MARIAN		<i>Attached to THERESA.</i>

ATTENDANTS, OFFICERS, SOLDIERS, &c. &c. &c.

SCENE *North of England.*

TIME 1745

SENSIBILITY.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

An extensive forest view. The castle of Eastham to the right. In the distance a rustic hut.

Enter WALTER and MERRY MEN in suits of Lincoln green.

WALTER.

We rendezvous to-morrow. I shall want you
To aid Lord Julian in some enterprise.

YEOMEN.

With all our hearts.

WALTER.

We have had a gallant brush.
Disperse! To your homes!

[Exeunt MERRY MEN.]

Ha! Here trips Marian.

Enter MARIAN.

MARIAN.

Walter, so far a-foot? What mirthful wind
Hath blown thee, mad-cap, near the brakes of Eastham?

WALTER.

'Ware lips! I 'm full of game, my bonnibel;
Your lovely countess hath a larder! deeming,
We soldiers, being sinful Lutherans,
Must feast that we may fight. I 'm full of game.

MARIAN.

You fight! Now out upon you for a braggart!
You and your counterfeit troop, who, though ye meet
Only to scare the foxes, 'maze the owls,
Stick not to swear, ye strike at human quarry.
You *play at soldiers!*

WALTER (*pointing to his sleeve.*)Does *this* look like jest?

MARIAN.

Your sleeve is stained with . . . What hast been about?
Oh, Walter! *It is blood!*

WALTER (*tossing his head proudly.*)

I play at soldiers!

MARIAN.

Is 't real? Thou ruthless man!
How few years since,
An innocent babe, thou nestled'st on those founts
That gushed to hush thy voice!

WALTER.

Now, by your leave,
I 'd nestle there again.

MARIAN.

How came that blood?

WALTER.

The Duke of Cumberland, you know, opposed
To the young Pretender

MARIAN (*interrupting*).

Sir, Prince Charles, Charles Stuart,
Who hath foiled your Duke, and stolen a march upon him.
Derby hath fall'n. Glad tidings for our Countess,
And all who love Rome's faith ;—the centuried boast
Of Eastham, as we are taught by Lady Vernon,
Her venerable grand-dame. Oh ! 't is pity,
Lord Julian, her recreant cousin, should
Deny his sovereign at his need.

WALTER.

Your lady
May find it fortunate in the event.

MARIAN.

That blood upon your sleeve ? You've not explained.

WALTER.

It chanced in aid of the Duke of Cumberland,
Set on last night by masked equestrians.

MARIAN.

You did not succour the usurper's brother ?

WALTER.

Being roused from covert by the clash of steel,
We issued forth, and scarce beneath the moon,
Young as the night, and swathed in dun, discerned
Two men oppressed by odds. I gave the word—
Rescue, my merry men ! *Charge ! Donnons !* So
We charged, the assailants fled. When, lo ! I found
I'd saved his Highness' and my patron's lives !

MARIAN.

What did Lord Julian with the enemy ?

WALTER.

You are a Jacobite, Marian ! I know not.
His lordship left the royal camp this morn,
For Baldwin, late your castle bailiff, lying
At point of death, had sent to him, to unfold
Some most important secret.

MARIAN.

The old man
Summoned Lord Francis likewise, who was absent ;
Also the Abbot, who had gone to pay
His homage to Prince Charles. But what dost thou
In these domains ?

WALTER.

A message to Dame Vernon,
Who deals in simples, Marian. Aroint her !
She never leaves her chamber—crazy witch !

MARIAN.

Witch ? Chemist, sir, and botanist.

“ A message ? ”

From her Protestant grandson ?

WALTER.

To entreat admittance
For words of brief discourse.

MARIAN.

She can't abide him.
No other motive ?

WALTER.

To be nearer thee,
Whom yet I'll call mine own.

MARIAN.

When lambs love wolves,
Or when my lady weds her eldest cousin !

WALTER.

Well, more unlikely things have chanced. She's woman,
I take it, though a dainty one ; and fortune
Annex'd to her rank and beauty vast estates,—
All confiscated ! Would my young lord had her !

MARIAN.

That day I'll act the other miracle :—
Put up with scape-grace Walter !

WALTER.

Bye!—we'll couple
When Eastham's Countess marries Julian.

MARIAN.

But not before! Get shrived, and quit your courses!
[*Exeunt separately.*]

SCENE II.

The sleeping apartment of DOWAGER LADY VERNON.

A large cabinet in one alcove; a couch in the other.

LADY VERNON reclining. Attendant near.

LADY VERNON.

Sent I an answer to Lord Julian?

ATTENDANT.

Your pleasure to receive

LADY VERNON.

True. Spoke we not
Erewhiles, of . . . What was't child?

ATTENDANT.

The castle steward . . .

LADY VERNON (*interrupting*).

No more the shrubs his garden owns, will offer
To him sweet incense! Sad!

ATTENDANT.

Not when the faithful

Depart, my lady.

LADY VERNON.

Death's their life! 'Tis hard, though,
When, lingering, we tread the prone descent
Of years. At your age, nothing!

(*Abstractedly.*) Full four score.

'Tis fifty years . . . (*She breaks off.*)

(*To Attendant.*) The Countess hath forgot me.

ATTENDANT.

She takes to heart her bailiff's loss.

LADY VERNON.

She has cause!

I prithee fetch those herbs I bade you gather,
Bathed in their daybreak dew.

[*Exit Attendant.*

Called home before me!

Were Julian *true* to holy church, I might,—
Now Baldwin's dead at last.—But Julian's *false*!
Then let his heritage depart from him,
Like strength and verdure from some branch that's struck
By lightning! May Theresa's *foreign* promise
Yield me blest fruit, since *native* stems grow rotten!

(*After a pause.*)

Unless, *he* being uprooted, the next heir,
His *Brother Francis*, might

Enter THERESA.

THERESA.

Dear grandmother,
Your pardon! But poor Baldwin!

LADY VERNON.

Shed no tears

For him whose pilgrimage is o'er; who, born
To serve, beheld in his ripe years his line
Exalted amongst peers.

THERESA.

His line ? of whom

Speak you ?

LADY VERNON.

I'm talking in my sleep. Where 's Julian ?
I think, that he requested—Yes—Your cousin ?

THERESA.

Sped to the royal camp.

LADY VERNON.

The royal ! Charles's ?

THERESA.

No. To the Duke, to negotiate for our safety,
And proffer fealty ; so prevent, on his part,
By secret means and acts, a hostile summons.

LADY VERNON.

Shame ! How unlike his sires ! King Charles, the martyr,
Declared to Heaven, he had no truer liegeman
Than him whose base descendant stoops to acknowledge
This Hanoverian branch.

THERESA (*proudly*).

While I'm its head,

My cousin scarce can compromise our house.

LADY VERNON (*coldly*).

True, child. And yet that Julian were stiff,
Rather than bend the head to Cumberland,
When Royal Stuart strikes for his father's crown.

*Enter LORD FRANCIS.*LORD FRANCIS (*to LADY VERNON*).

Your blessing !

THERESA.

Francis ?

LORD FRANCIS.

Lady cousin, I
Come from yon camp ; whence I had nearly borne
Captive the elector's brother.

LADY VERNON.

Glorious venture !

THERESA.

What interposed to foil your enterprise ?

LORD FRANCIS.

The gallant bearing of a single knight,
Who suddenly broke in, crost all my hope.
For, shortly after, being assailed by numbers,
Your vassals fled. But to redeem this rescue,
Marquis Fitz Simple, second in command
To Cumberland, and quartered near, I met,
And, on the strength of old acquaintance, brought
To lay his heart's devotion at thy shrine.

THERESA.

How should the Marquis' visit here compensate
For your mischance ?

LADY VERNON (*eagerly*).

What, see you not ? Recall
Your influence o'er your slave, and smile ! for should he
(The land being in the glow) oppose his rank,
Revenues, state, commission, 'gainst King George,
Such high ensample of revolt will stir
England to take the Stuart's impress.

THERESA.

Wouldst
Enlist my smiles, e'en though the maiden's lure
Were quenched in nuptial tears ?

Enter LORD JULIAN.

JULIAN (*abruptly*).

Theresa, never !

THERESA (*proudly*).

Ungentle lord! I am the Countess Eastham,
And little heed your veto, were it only
For thy officious embassy.

LORD FRANCIS (*to JULIAN*)

 'T were fitting
More deference to our house's head!

LADY VERNON (*to JULIAN*).

 And honour,
For our ancient faith and loyalty!

THERESA (*to JULIAN, with hauteur*).

You hear?

Good grandmother, excuse me. Prithee, Francis,
Lend me your arm awhile.

LORD FRANCIS.

 Your servant, grandame!

[*Exeunt THERESA and LORD FRANCIS.*]

LADY VERNON (*after a long pause*).

Your eyeballs strain, as if they'd pierce beyond
The scope of vision. (*A pause.*)

 Walter brought me message,
That thou, it irks me to say grandson, wished
An interview? (*Another pause.*)

 You gaze on vacancy.

LORD JULIAN (*apostrophizing THERESA*).

What! shall fate nip thy promise, and thy leaflets
Scatter abroad along the world's highway?
No, scornful as thou art! upon my breast
Thou yet mayst flourish; *there* the fairest rose
In Fortune's bounteous wreath.

LADY VERNON.

 Lord Julian,

You intrude upon my leisure.

LORD JULIAN (*solemnly*).

Close thine eyes !

Think, from her awful bench descended, Justice
Takes stand before thee, to demand thy full
Admission of that crime whereof, at length,
She hath cognizance.

LADY VERNON.

What crime ? Irreverend !

LORD JULIAN.

Examine through the progress of thy youth,
Thou need'st not. Oh ! for whom such epoch is,
Time hath no landmarks else—
It stands from out the past an ominous beacon,
As all besides of life were blank and void ;—
What deed ? That which Ralph Baldwin on his deathbed
Confessed,—impeached thee of.

LADY VERNON.

Though every breath

I draw be seventy summers old, these portents
Do cause no palsy. Still this brittle jail
In which I languish, is unapt to bear
My son's son's humours.

Pray find other business.

LORD JULIAN.

Think, did I lay thee open to the world
For this imposture ?

LADY VERNON.

What imports thy word

Without my evidence ? Whose dying breath
Shall leave my fame . . unless Heaven first take vengeance
Upon thy head . . unsullied. Yea, perish
Even the memory of Eastham, rather
Than that the sacred cause I love should suffer,

In the tithing of a barleycorn, by conduct
Of my descendant !

LORD JULIAN.

Neither did my sire,
Nor Gerald, who's the rightful earl, renounce
Your church and politics. Why not have spoke
Ere *I* knew good from ill ?

LADY VERNON.

I was bound to silence
The while the changeling lived. But Ralph to bring
To nought the secret pride of his long life !

LORD JULIAN.

Death brandishes Ithuriel's spear ere he
Will strike the pen'tent. He's a great magician.

LADY VERNON.

Potent, indeed ! To wring *such* issues !

Did he,

Baldwin, explain how his spurious progeny
Supplied the place of Vernon's ?

LORD JULIAN.

He affirmed,
That, having long been married, and despairing
Thy husband's wish *indeed*, you feigned its advent ;
Moving him, thy bailiff, that his newborn son
Should counterfeit the expected heir. You swore . . .

LADY VERNON (*interrupting*).

That oath I have kept ! ' *T is cancelled !* On the world
I imposed for mine, *his* offspring . . Yea, the changeling,
Who, having perched upon the cloud of eagles,
And wedded, died last year, the earldom leaving
To his orphan child, Theresa.

Not long after

I practised this deception, I gave being
Unto my first-born, Gerald, and next year

Thy father saw the light. How then I wailed
My crime!

Soon fled my lord! And hath not death
Seized on my youngest born, then on your mother?
But know; the retribution that strikes deepest—
Glutted with which the vulture that feeds here
Must seek repose, not ere thy bones or mine
Lie in the tomb—descends through *thee*, whose vile
Degeneracy is now the only bar
(*Alas! unless some sudden fate o'ertake thee,*
A bar insuperable) to promulging
The truth. It may not be. Our rank ancestral
Be held for ever by Ralph's alien race!
Rather than, on thy uncle's death, the coronet
Circle the brow of him who hath cast aside
Allegiance, and credence in our church.

LORD JULIAN.

Behold drawn out, in Baldwin's well-known hand,
By letters of thine own substantiated,
A narrative of all!

(JULIAN produces a small packet.)

The ends of justice
Need not *thy* testimony.

LADY VERNON (*with sneering indignation*).

Filial spite!
Meet yoke-devil for rancour 'gainst thy monarch!
(*She turns away, JULIAN follows her*).

LORD JULIAN (*in bland accents*).

I'll woo Theresa's love; our union
Would obviate all exposure.

LADY VERNON (*turns quickly round, then with startling
fierceness*).

Breed a race—
I'll prevent that!—of Brunswickers to Eastham?

(*With taunting irony.*)

When confidence doth dance within thine eyes,
And she, Theresa, 'spoiled of rank and fortune,
Whom thou wouldst tempt, stands trembling, thou wilt
take her

By the palm proudly, while in thought thou graspest
The orb of heaven—"Thy fair Eden!" style her,
Who cannot choose but have thee, when you whisper
How you brought low *her bailiff's grand-daughter*,
In hopes to bribe her love, by raising her
To a *reflected grandeur*! With what quickness
She'll quit her wonted hauteur!

LORD JULIAN.

Well I know
That fair one's exquisite fine sense of honour.
So, *past recall*, I will win her ere Time wakes
The truth.

You, madam, might her hard thoughts soften,
And thus compound our secret-jarring claims.

LADY VERNON.

Sooner would I compound me with the dust,
Than lend my aid to sever from Rome's church
The House of Eastham!

LORD JULIAN (*threateningly*).

Then should Baldwin's tale
Ere see the light! . . .

LADY VERNON (*scornfully*).

I will *myself* divulge it.
When thou art a faithful Vernon . . . or liest down
Beneath some blighted yew, whose poisonous leaf
Kills as it falls.

LORD JULIAN.

Dared I to trust thy thoughts, 'twixt Heaven and me,
I'd ask thy blessing!

[*Exit* LORD JULIAN.]

LADY VERNON (*alone*).

Gone! and with a threat!

Upon *his* lips, who yields to every impulse!
That I had that history! My soul doth yearn
To shake concealment, like a viper, off,
Which yet must gnaw, since Gerald's next of kin
Proves false to holy see!

I will unfold me

First to the Abbot. Well he knows the springs
Of man's affections, passions, and can sound
The heart, and draw its secrets forth, whose ends
He shapes to the exaltation of our church.
I'll straight instruct him in his rights . . .

Inform him

Of the vast import of that packet, which
Could he but seize on, where the harm though Julian
The apostate dropt asleep? *Lord Francis then!*

(*Pauses, then goes to the cabinet, which she unlocks,
and takes a small case therefrom.*)

Ye drops immortal!

Distilled from baleful herbs and juice of flowers,
Close corked and sealed!

My soul enjoys her presage,

That destiny reserves for my revenge
An hour, not distant.

Gerald! 'Tis his step

Pacing my ante-room . . . Returned.

He dines

Daily with graceless Julian.

I will join him

With this,—foreshape his thought—

My reverend son!

[*Exit* LADY VERNON.]

END OF ACT FIRST.

ACT II.

SCENE I.

Ramparts of Eastham Castle.

Enter LORD JULIAN and WALTER.

LORD JULIAN.

You placed that packet in the Countess' hand?
What was 't she said?

WALTER.

Not much; but when the sex
Are chary of their words, their eyes, like steeds
Held in, betray their metal.

LORD JULIAN.

Well, what looked she?

WALTER.

When I, according to your orders, prayed
She 'd guard the seal'd-up roll as 't were her life,
At first she appeared amazed, then took it thus, . .
As if it burnt her.

LORD JULIAN.

Made she no remark?

WALTER.

None that I caught, except a phantom sound,
That slept upon the pillows of her lips,
Like air entangled 'mid the lazy chords

Of harps Æolian, to the effect, that she
Would *hide it close* enough ! and then she smiled.

LORD JULIAN (*aside*).

The proofs would her undo are in her keeping.

(*After a pause.*)

That subtle spark which reason cannot reach
Stirreth my soul's misgivings, like presentation
Of danger,—which I'll heed.

The Dowager

Will seek from *me* alone those depositions ;
So in the hazards which impend, they are better,
Securer in the custody of Theresa,—
The last to be suspected !

Who comes hither ?

My brother, with the Lord Fitz Simple, whom,
If I divine aright, I yet may spoil,
For treachery, if not courtship.

This way, Walter !

I shall require your troop disguised, anon,
On the King's service.

By his Highness' sanction . . .

(LORD JULIAN and WALTER retire in discourse up the
stage.)

Enter LORD FRANCIS and the MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

I am not convinced

I've doubts I ought to make,—

Grave doubts, *considering* ! An offer. Fail you,
How am I to escape the peril ?

LORD FRANCIS.

Peril ! Seek

The shadow of the tomb. She's ever near
In shape of agues, 'neath the sun. Else, press her
Until she yield her perfume up of glory.

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

Pooh ! pooh !—What's glory ? Nonsense !—speak to the peril.

LORD FRANCIS.

The heir of England's ancient line of monarchs
Displays his snow-white standard. Who'd not hurry,
As war horse, when the trumpet ——

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

Hey ! Quick march

To the devil ?

LORD FRANCIS.

The devil ! To Prince Charles, by my faith !
With full five hundred men.

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE. (*lugubriously*).

Is this a head

To flourish on a pole ?

LORD FRANCIS.

What makes it shake so ?

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

My head ? Ha ! does it ? Do not breathe upon me :
I feel the very current of thy words
Blow it like weathercock.

LORD FRANCIS.

If London fall,

Most of the Elector's generals will go headless.

Let's talk of the Countess. There were an alliance !
You are troubled.

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE (*agitated*).

I ? I am free, I hope !

(*Aside.*) There's something

In perpetration of this match, that may,
With a small key, be opened to my danger.

LORD FRANCIS.

I grant you tell yon land by leagues, not acres ;
But she is a world herself—of as choice clay
As ever wore a hoop.

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

I'll toss a guinea.

'T were best, *considering* ! See you ! Heads or tails !
Bless me ! how apropos ! . . . The tail, I take it,
Is woman . . . that's my wife . . . *to come*. The head,
King George ? It stands . . of course, stands for himself.

LORD JULIAN (*advancing*).

He takes his own part ever, to the terror
Of every Jacobite who'd wound the bosom
Of our dear country.
(*To LORD FRANCIS.*) Frown not : I intend
To undermine these workings of our house ;
Yea, though ye dig like moles ! and that you'll witness
Ere long. But I demand from my Lord Marquis,
Why he decks treason's front with his fair honours ?

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE (*in trepidation*).

Now I'm betrayed for certain ! and yet—no,
You don't suppose, that I'm a married man ?

LORD JULIAN.

Tell what overt mad act ?

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE (*still more confused*).

Alas ! Alack !

I can only tell it to my ghostly father.
It was too simple of me.

LORD JULIAN.

Simple ! What ?

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE (*relieved*).

Nay, if you know not, sir, I know not either.

LORD JULIAN (*sternly*).

Your mission here ?

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

Is that all ? (*Aside.*) Troth ! this conscience—
A kind of a quotidian, leaves a man
No interval ! (*Aloud.*) Do you question angrily ?

LORD JULIAN.

Commissioned by his highness. Lo ! his seal
And signature attest.

LORD FRANCIS.

In office, brother ?

(To MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.)

You 've but one course with honour left.

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

Considering !

To summer help.

(Runs towards the battlements.)

LORD JULIAN.

But stir towards that door,
And, as I have a soul, I 'll nail thy life to it !

(LORD JULIAN draws a broken sword.)

LORD FRANCIS.

Ha !—'t is my broken blade, which last night's fray . . .

LORD JULIAN.

Thine ! And wast thou the knight with whom I changed
Weapons ?

Enter LORD GERALD, ABBOT OF WIDFORD.

LORD FRANCIS.

My uncle, save you ! *(Motions to JULIAN.)*

Julian 't was

Who, favoured by the darkness, from my gripe
Rescued the Duke of Cumberland, as I told you.

THE ABBOTT *(aside)*.

I 'll seize the occasion.

(Aloud.) Some one view my face.

This news has stabbed me.

'T is a demonstration

'Gainst James the Third, whom yesterday——

I am grieved,

Upon compulsion . . . but you 'll keep your chamber.

LORD JULIAN.

In a free land, there's risk in such detention

Enter Guard.

THE ABBOT.

Be he secured !

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

With irons : *considering !*

GUARD.

Lord Julian ?

THE ABBOT.

Lord Julian ! Francis, duty

To my true sovereign.

LORD JULIAN.

George the Second ?

ABBOT.

No !

(*Aside.*)

These proofs !

LORD JULIAN.

Theresa

ABBOT (*interrupting*).

Dare not contravene

Whate'er, I deem, make for her interests,

As well in this brief scene, as those which centre

Upon eternity.

LORD FRANCIS.

Nay, pause !

ABBOT.

No word !

To prevent it I'll withdraw. He shall not long
Remain a prisoner.

(*Aside.*) That is, no longer

Than is required to obtain Ralph Baldwin's packet.

(*Apart.*) Which proffers to my earth-estrangèd heart,

Title and power, wherein I glory not,
But only in the cross, yet would receive,
As doth the censer incense, to diffuse
A sacred gale of blessings . . Means to bow
To the Holy See these gossellers again.

(*To the Guard.*)

To the southern tower his lordship!

[*Exit Abbot.*]

LORD FRANCIS (*sheathing sword*).

This I'll render,

With white cockade to boot, when to his throne
James Stuart is restored.

LORD JULIAN.

'T will rust first, brother!

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

Gad! take me with you. Nail my life to the door!

LORD JULIAN.

My lord, you are superseded.

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

What! you joke!

I will turn Jacobite,—*considering!*

And join the Pre——

LORD FRANCIS.

Prince Charles. If you do not,
Both ways you are undone.

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

Cashier a marquis!

[*Exeunt MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE and LORD FRANCIS.*]

(*WALTER comes forward.*)

WALTER.

This goes to the Countess. She will free her cousin,
If not, I know who will. “*I play at soldiers!*”

[*Exit WALTER.*]

LORD JULIAN (*to the Guard*).

By your leave awhile.

(*Waves his hand. The Guard moves some paces off.*)

The young Pretender's fortune
Corrupts men's wisdom. I have ta'en in hand,
By favour of the Duke of Cumberland,
To model their devices. Neither Francis,
Our uncle, nor the dowager shall fall
Within the scope of danger. Much less *she*,
False pageant! of awe as loveliness
Composed, to whom from earliest memory
I have raised an altar here, but dared not love.
So, in their crystal case at humble distance,
Men worship saints, but where were the idolatry
To kneel before Theresa?

Enter THERESA behind.

THERESA.

Hath she not

A title, sir?

LORD JULIAN.

To all men's humble duty,
And woman's envy.

THERESA (*with slight scorn*).

Little there's to envy;
And I see signs of duty, none i' the world.

LORD JULIAN.

Could you discern what's written here . . .

THERESA (*coldly*).

I would not,
Assume what text it may.

You dare to cast
Obedience off, by some mysterious compact,

Which with the Duke . . .

(*To the Guard.*) I'll answer for Lord Julian.

[*Exeunt Guard.*]

LORD JULIAN.

Didst thou hie hitherward with kind intent
To free me ?

THERESA (*distant in her manner*).

Yet, my lord, I thought not of you.

'Tis, that I'm loth to brook the Abbot's sway
In secular matters.

Thou art at liberty.

LORD JULIAN.

The world is in eclipse beyond these walls.

THERESA (*distant in her manner*).

That's as you list, my lord. 'T were best you be not
Seen abroad.

LORD JULIAN.

Stay !

THERESA (*surprised*).

Cousin !

LORD JULIAN.

Vouchsafe my lips

Launch on the air a simple word or two ?

If they offend, incline to sounds more grateful
Your ear, and my breath dies in space.

THERESA (*frigidly*).

I am

Surprised ; you may proceed, my lord. Be brief.

LORD JULIAN.

Recall that happy time in which I know,
That with a shower of tears you had prevented
A woe from aching here. Ye wing'd hours !
When we shot up together, hearts and statues—
Then free as light our speech, with fingers linked

We sang, and voices mingled ; or we leant
 Over the self-same sketches, while our hearts
 Would scarcely touch, but those slight contacts left,
 As they had been the pulses of the soul,
 A sense behind of worlds unrealized,
 Worlds they might be of woe, of bliss, of all
 Things vague, alas ! of all . . . *except repose !*

THERESA.

Why these remembrances, my lord, since *thou*
 Hast changed, and I am Countess Eastham now,
 Who is no more a child ? 'T is past. Proceed.

Enter the ABBOT, behind.

LORD JULIAN (*impassionately*).

Thou art to *me* a child new born ! For a time
 Thy lot, far sinking into splendour, cast
 A flood over the heavens. *Then* my eyes
 Were dazzled ! But since yesterday, Theresa,
 The scene is dimmed,—the garish veil recedes.
 Again in pristine gentleness thou dawnest,
 And ever to thy setting, thou must claim
 Worship almost as something holy . . . sent
 In thy infantile helplessness, that I
 Should guard thee, cherish, bless, adore, and . . . *love !*

(LORD JULIAN *sinks on his knees*.)

THERESA (*with chilling voice, and distant manner*).

I know no more of this than that 't is evil :
 Your suit were fruitless, hopeless ; pardon me,—
 Presumptuous.

Rise, my lord, and let my presence
 Charm less, and awe thee more. Thou dost forget
 Thyself, as thou hast forgotten loyal duty.

LORD JULIAN (*rising*).

(*With deep pathos*.)

Then is the fountain dried at which I 'd turn

This barren waste of life to joy. There's *something*—
 'Tis well thou knowest not . . . *ne'er, I trust, wilt learn,*
 Now strives for passage at mine eyes, which were not—
 Not wholly on my own account.

May Heaven
 My heart's too full! . . . Thou 'lt think, should I transgress
 Manhood, my passion's feigned; so I would hide
 My weakness.

Give me license kiss thy hand?

But once, Theresa!

THERESA (*moved*).

Julian!

LORD JULIAN (*with deep feeling*).

That's the name!

You had forgot.

Where is your hand? I'm blind.

THERESA.

Cousin! (*Aside*.)

He weeps too tenderly. Men's tears
 Are dreadful. I have wronged him all along
 To think he held me lightly.

(*Aloud*.) You'll endeavour
 Forget this dream of passion.

That flame's false
 Hope draws towards herself, with which she kindles
 But to expire. Go forth into the world.

LORD JULIAN (*in a mournful voice*).

The forest glades are quiet as the churchyard.
 Thither—Fare—fare—thee—well!

(*As LORD JULIAN retires the ABBOT advances.*)

THE ABBOT.

Refrain thy step!

(*LORD JULIAN stands at some distance apart.*)

THERESA.

Your reverence startled me : this harsh procedure
Against Lord Julian . . .

THE ABBOT (*apart to THERESA*).

'T is avouched he hides
A packet full of complots, such as hardly
Decline the name of treason, 'gainst the Stuarts.
Now, since Charles Edward will within a week
Be installed in London Regent, I would fain
Hush its being known, a scion of your house,
Bearing our name, had done his best to uphold
The usurper George.

THERESA (*startled and aside*).

It is the same! And I,
In my mere frolic, made my grandmother
Depositary of these treasonous writings!
But which must be reclaimed. For all his faults,
He shall not be endangered.

(*Aloud to the ABBOT.*) And would scrawls
Be proof 'gainst Julian?

THE ABBOT.

Only for their purport,
His life, and th' reverence in men's minds towards
Our ancient household faith could not be struck at.
So art or violence must . . .

THERESA (*interrupting*).

My lord, you'll please,
Despite those papers, liberate your nephew.

(*She gazes on JULIAN, who stands apart, intently.*)

(*Aside.*)

He looks his monument. All is not well
Within, and *my* heart sinks . . . would vent a sigh
In vain! We are brothers' children, so our veins

Strike harmony in their motion. (*Pauses.*)

(*After a deep sigh.*) *That's the cause!—*

Of course!

The dowager shall straight restore
The foul pollution, which I'll cleanse the earth of.

(*Aloud.*) My lords, adieu!

[*Exit* THERESA.]

THE ABBOT (*apart*).

Since Julian courts the usurpress, through his passion
I'll reap the profit of that horrible deed
My mother dared to hint, the sin avoiding.
By love impelled, he may as zealous prove
In rousing this apostate land, like warrior
From his dark slumber, to the light, as Francis.
England hath need of both. Far looks the hour
Beyond the ignorant present. Shake thy arches
With loud joy, Heaven!

(*Aloud to JULIAN.*) You love that fair one?

LORD JULIAN (*coming forward*).

Could you

Play eaves-dropper?

THE ABBOT.

I spy no mulct in nature
Or mind, and sure high lineage were no blemish,
To bar your happiness.

LORD JULIAN.

No mulct? Alas!

THE ABBOT.

Can heir of Eastham's earldom fear repulse
From low-born maid, and poor . . . a nobody?

LORD JULIAN.

The heir of . . . ? What! the dowager hath made
Thee privy to her dreams?

THE ABBOT.

I am Earl of Eastham,
And thou'rt my nephew. 'Tis no dream.

LORD JULIAN.

Thy mother
Wanders at times. This old wife's tale!
'T were better
Hushed up.

THE ABBOT.

You've letters, depositions, proofs.

LORD JULIAN (*coldly*).

They may be.

THE ABBOT.

We'll not harm the changeling's daughter,
Marry Theresa! (*After a pause.*)
What! you think her heart
Alien?

LORD JULIAN.

Alas! with her own lips . . .

THE ABBOT.

Enigma,
She cannot pierce herself . . . a virgin's wish!
Your ears deceived you, lord. Theresa loves you!

LORD JULIAN (*with wild emotion*).

Love! Prithee, play not on me!

THE ABBOT.

As your bride
Betrothed, she scarce affected were by fall
From rank and fortune, which she'll feel were justice
You owe yourself and house.

LORD JULIAN (*with sudden anger*).

To this reverse
Allude by slightest seeming . . . But a whisper
That she usurps thy rights, ere past recall

She's mine, and every scrap on which you build
For proof is tinder!

THE ABBOT.

Nephew! thou art too hasty.

In ignorance of her wrong, and of thy prospects,
(I am hasting on; as soon as Heaven calls,
Those rights and titles must descend to you.)
She, *yet in thought the Countess*, shall avow
Her love, accept your hand—yea shall to-morrow!

LORD JULIAN (*breathlessly*).

I'll thank thee with that packet.

THE ABBOT.

I'll remind you.

LORD JULIAN.

Can it be? Why even now! . .

THE ABBOT.

She but made trial

How you'd endure indifference.

(*He turns away.*)

LORD JULIAN.

"Charm less,"

Her presence should—Awe more. "Presumptuous!" Sure
These words were hers?

But she'll throw off the mask!

[*Exit* LORD JULIAN.]

THE ABBOT (*alone*).

Steel-hoofed our church to trample down the thorns
That cross the path of duty!

If they have been
Deep graved, those stringent principles, which I
Have strove to fix as landmarks in her heart.
Whereby to steer when SELF sits in the wind;
Beacons to cheer, when falls the night of age;
And anchors to uphold her in the shock
Of Nature's dissolution; then Theresa

Will do my priestly bidding.

(*After a pause.*) First on Julian ;—
She shall essay love's alchemy to scale
His eyes. He'll not reject that one proviso ?
What, yield in fond infatuation up
His heritage, yet *there* stand out? Oh, not
To be supposed !

(*After a pause.*) *But should he ?*

(*Another pause.*) Then the packet,
He being my heir, had better find earth's centre !
If he demur—she must accept the marquis,
Her heart, thank Heaven ! indifferent. Instrument,
Predestined to regenerate her country,
Either way.

This at the confessional
Having announced, I'll melt her trembling will,
To pour it in the moulds of my high purpose.

[*Exit the ABBOT.*]

END OF ACT SECOND.

ACT III.

SCENE I.

The oratory of the ABBOT.

LORD JULIAN *seated.*

LORD JULIAN.

Within an hour conduct her !

Now wild tumult
Fills all my veins to bursting. *Now* my heart
Is still upon its throne, and waits with awe
The portent of the time. (*He starts up.*)

Footsteps ? They are here !

Enter THERESA and the ABBOT.

THE ABBOT.

Her ladyship will offer

LORD JULIAN.

Let my knee

Thus bent pay service.

THE ABBOT.

Reasons for subjecting
To hard construction her clear thoughts.

(*ABBOT aside to THERESA.*)

Best comforts

Bless your sweet sacrifice of female pride

To duty ! (*Apart.*)

I'll be by. The proof may fail
Which tests, when lying in his bosom, whether . . .

(*The ABBOT appears to make his exit, but retires to the back of the stage.*)

LORD JULIAN.

Lady, your condescension hath bereft me
Of speech to thank you.

THERESA,

Not thy true love's sighs
Could draw from me the heart of my inclining
Towards one, who warped, alas ! by new opinions,
Believes not as the church believes, without
The Abbot's sanction.

(*Aside.*) *That* absolves the soul !
(*Aloud.*) Thou art silent.

LORD JULIAN.

Lest some word may lurk behind ;
And that my heart, which flutters winged with joy,
Upraised too high, break on its fall. My breath
Is lost. Speak on ! for *thine* hath harmony
To usher in the harvest of my hopes
Beyond the hymning lark.

THERESA (*aside*).

Until this penance,
I only thought of Julian as my kinsman.
The transition 's not so hard ! Scarce maidenly,
I fear. Who gifts the orange plant with blossom
And fruit together sanctify these tremors !
(*Aloud.*) Thou hast my love, dear cousin !

LORD JULIAN (*embracing her warmly*).

Let me fold thee,
And seal our contract *thus*, till thy white palm
Take colour from the heart that melts thereon.

(*THERESA blushing deeply and confused, disengages herself from his arms.*)

THERESA (aside).

I do not know myself. How hot my cheek is!
Have I ta'en sudden enchantment in my blood?

LORD JULIAN.

Why turn as if you feared?

THERESA (with slight trepidation).

I have dared too much.

(*Aside.*) Should he decline, I have mocked myself.

LORD JULIAN.

As if

You doubted me, Theresa?

THERESA.

I have doubts,

But not . . of *you* . . at all.

(*Aside.*) My spirits sink

While acting *that* I am decreed to do.

Things seem not as they did.

LORD JULIAN (aside).

What streams of joy

Run through me! knowing, come storms when they list,
They'll find her sheltered. (*Aloud, tenderly.*)

Fortune cast thy slights,

Our hearts shall chime in chorus like the spheres,
That tune their motion still to happiness.

THERESA (aside).

How feelingly he speaks. I must not trust . . .

Fie, fie! my beating heart!

LORD JULIAN (tenderly).

Our souls and loves

Shall circle fast like vines in one another;

One joy shall make us smile, and one grief mourn !
One age ! One grave ! One heaven !

THERESA (*aside*).

In his eye
Lies couched some spell which awes, yet draws me near,
A seraph steep'd in light !

LORD JULIAN (*tenderly*).

Be it for better
And loftier, or for worse, no chance, remember,
Our wishes can divide for evermore.

THERESA (*aside*).

There must some sorcery ravel out his tongue
To wind about my soul ! The diamond's cut
By its own dust. This fine device hath caught me.
(*Aloud*).

I would the truth of your attachment test,
By . . . (*Aside*.)

Something bids me pause. *My heart*, which turned
Into a lump of lead, doth sound my danger.

LORD JULIAN.

I will take pride to evince my love's devotion.

THERESA (*aside*).

I've blindly reached the brink of a precipice.
(*Aloud*.) On that condition, cousin (falter not),
I grant thy suit.

LORD JULIAN.

Condition ? You named none.

THERESA (*aside*).

My full resolve to keep my pledge did not
Presage this startling softness. I am changed,
But how, I rather *feel* than *know*. My nature
Doth put on childishness until I melt
Into a willing passion.

LORD JULIAN.

Still as night

I'm listening.

Why dost sigh, and turn so pale?

THERESA (*after a pause, abruptly*).

Join the chevalier Prince Charles, at Derby.

LORD JULIAN.

Do you speak this truly?

THERESA (*aside*).

Oh! there is a fear

Sits cold upon my heart.

LORD JULIAN.

'T were such a crime

As heathens blush at,—nature and religion

Tremble to hear. Prove false unto the crown?

Upon my country fasten wounds?

THERESA (*apart*).

The virgin

Instruct my breath to pray! At length I pierce

His worth.

Or have I loved, and knew it not!

(*Aloud.*)

My lord, repulse me.

LORD JULIAN.

Would you have me forfeit

What was in the creation of my soul

Articled—my honour?

(THE ABBOT *advances*.)THERESA (*aside*).

Ah! too late—too late!

An evident beauty in his soul, I never

Looked on, attracts me to him!

Can the cause

Be wrong which *he* espouses? I begin

To waver! Rather something whispers here,

I am blind in my opinions, so would yield them
Up to him, captive, though I came assured
Of conquest over *his*.

THE ABBOT (*who had overheard the last words*).

(*Sternly.*)

To such base yielding, life, where air is fire,
Were certain adjunct !

THERESA.

Ha !

LORD JULIAN (*to the ABBOT*).

You've paltered with me !

THE ABBOT.

She proffered you her hand. As I engaged.

LORD JULIAN.

To lead me to rebellion !

THE ABBOT.

Back to virtue !

THERESA (*apart, with enthusiasm*).

Oh !—how I love this man ! *How truly honour him !*

THE ABBOT (*aside to THERESA*).

Retire to your parlour, where shall wait on you,
Marquis Fitz Simple.

THERESA (*in an agonised voice*).

How you fright my senses !

Marquis !—what have I ?—God !—Undone for ever !

[*Exit THERESA.*]

LORD JULIAN.

I pray thee, nay, I charge thee, that no word,—
No, not a silent look excite suspicion.
If e'er, *till I consent*, you shock Theresa,
By hinting at her lineage,—not a tittle
Of proof shall 'scape destruction !

[*Exit LORD JULIAN.*]

THE ABBOT (*alone*).

At thy door,

By my contrivance——

I have had his chamber

Searched strictly. All in vain

Perchance his person

Enter Guard.

Lord Julian is arrested? Where? . . .

(*Holding out his hand.*)

(*After a pause, sharply.*) The writings

Found on him?

GUARD.

There were *none*, I think, your reverence.

THE ABBOT.

Never think more! Inquire!

[*Exit Guard.*]

THE ABBOT (*alone*).

I'd yield my *breath*

Over this outcast isle, its throne, to lift

The chair of Peter; but my brainish parent,

Her *soul*. *That vial!*

Lock and key awhile

Shall keep out of her mania's reach my nephew.

'Tis plain, Theresa, who I hoped had power

To allure this stray sheep to the fold again,

Wants strength to stand *herself*, and 'neath his spell

Would prove apostate. Oh! *that shall not be!*

Sad error! Dread recoil! (*After a pause.*)

The alternative

Be embraced. The Marquis' offer!

Now no choice!

Instant the nuptials! **MUST!**

(*With slow and resolved accents.*)

The red iron sears

And heals together.

(After a pause.)

Where no human motives
Are wrapped in doubt, I feel I stand acquitted!

[*Exit*,

END OF SCENE FIRST.

SCENE II.

The Boudoir of THERESA.

Enter THERESA.

THERESA.

If 't is withheld, that treasonable deposit,
From Marion's requisition

Swifter, Iris!

I'll fly

(As THERESA is hurrying out, enter MARIAN, with packet.)

MARIAN.

You pant! Your ladyship is breathless!

THERESA *(taking the packet)*.

Thou wast too slow?

MARIAN.

When first I asked your grandma,
A slouching o'er her graceless herbs, to give
The packet back, no frost more chill; as if
Her honoured life-blood had been locked in it;

Then, with a sudden thaw,—

“ I ’ll humour her :
You ’ll wait.” So seeks her closet, whence that roll.
Not *I* was slow.

THERESA.

Pray leave !

MARIAN (*aside*).

In one hour trust,
And take a thing ! She knows her mind as little
As her chemical grandma. One of these fine days,
I should not wonder, in her odd mutations,
She took a fancy to her cousin Julian !
Then Walter, probably . . . I ’m gone, my lady.

[*Exit* MARIAN.]

THERESA (*alone*).

I ’d peer within this marble covering,
To learn the form invisible death assumes,
Wherewith to snare men’s souls, but that I am bathed
In dew, the while I hold what might convict
Julian of sentiments hostile to King James.
Here I annihilate

(*She approaches the fire, and is just about to thrust
therein the packet.*)

Re-enter MARIAN.

MARIAN.

Please you, Lord Fitz Simple.

THERESA (*in agitation*).

You do not well to fright me thus ! Not now.
But ah ! to infringe a particle of breath
My vow hath offered, violates all.

The sooner

In such conjunctures that—

MARIAN.

“ Not now,” my lady ?

THERESA (*in abstraction, apart*).
 Better the moveless cloud of thunder burst,
 Than shake in instant dread !

MARIAN.

I'll . . .

THERESA (*in abstraction, apart*).

Soft, not yet.

I heard with slumberous ear,—

“Should Julian
 Shun, like an earthy root, the sun that blesseth,
 Then aid our sacred cause, through Lord Fitz Simple.”
 Deaf to the ruin-fraught sense of words that rend
 My brain with fire to utter, I—(*She breaks off.*)

Oh, Heavens !

Re-act my insidious part, *now* that my heart
 Thrills to unwonted sympathy with all
 Emotions warm and truthful !

But the marquis ?

His honour will not sit more loosely on him
 Than Julian's did—No other trust ! I have entered
 Into a wilderness,—no friendly clue
 Besides to be my guide.

MARIAN.

The marquis' step—

THERESA.

Well,—give me breath . . .

MARIAN.

His lordship's here, my lady.

Enter the MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

THERESA.

Ha ! I'll dismiss him with a syllable !

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE (*apart*).

I'm no such scare ; nor do I see exactly
What fault there is that she can find with me ;—
Considering !

THERESA.

Marian, leave us.

MARIAN.

Well, I'd rather
My *qui-va-la*. What's blood ? Bah ! Give me beauty.
[*Exit* MARIAN.]

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

Now for some tender word, like what I popped
To Fanny, when Fan Tawny, to come o'er her !

THERESA.

By my wise uncle privileged, I presume
I see your lordship ?

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE (*with a simper*).
Privileged !

THERESA.

I attend you.

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

Until I court her, she . . . (*Kneels.*)
Before thee Venus
Shows but a blouze along the milky way ;
The other gods, from out their crystal windows,
Look down amazed in constant admiration ! . .

THERESA.

Arise ! I'll not affect to doubt your meaning,
And, by my uncle guided, I am ready
To . . . (*With sudden wildness.*)
To accept . . . oh, God ! I cannot speak it !
Impossible ! What ! *Must* I . . .

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

Troth, you must.
You fetch your breath as short as a wing'd bird.
These gifts of mine, that take you so, with me
Are natural. You 'd have me for a husband?

THERESA (*wildly*).

Hush such harsh sounds !

The mandrake hath no voice
Like thine; the raven, when compared with thee,
Sings soft. What, *husband*? *Thou*?

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

Our hearts, forsooth,
Are distant; but,—I speak not from experience,—
I've a shrewd doubt, they'll meet in marriage.

THERESA (*in a deep voice of terror*).

Marriage?

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

Yes, that's the noble matter, which, *considering* . . .

THERESA.

No dream then, but *a truth* that cannot fade !
Thou art paying thy addresses !

(MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE *bows*.) I stand by,
And calmly listen ! '*T is incredible* !
Hold, brain ! I'll do my heaven-appointed penance !

(*Her voice falters, and she turns aside ; recovering her
self-possession with a determined effort, she approaches
the MARQUIS, and adds*)

My lord, my hand :—'t is thine, if you will have it.

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

She's in suspense.

(*Aside*.) That knot tied half with liquor,
Nced be no hindrance.

(*Aloud*.) Have it? Thus I shake it !

(*Seizes her hand, and shakes it*.)

THERESA (*aside*).

O'er what a bridge of glass I'd 'scape the flood
Of horror which sets in!

(*Aloud, after a pause.*) If I mistake not,—
You bear arms for King George?

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE (*embarrassed*).

King George? It may be,
And may not be. What of it?

THERESA.

Every thing!

For whoso holds this hand, must set his all
On the same cast that I do,—that of Charles.

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

We'll fit our legs to the same boot, forsooth.

THERESA (*in agitation*).

But, sir! my lord! Oh, hear me! . . . Why, our views
Wide as the arctics sunder us.

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

Your uncle

Has shown sufficing reasons why I, being
Secretly a faithful Catholic, should aid
The young Pretender.

THERESA.

Oh! 'T would make you hideous.

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

I am not so frightful.

THERESA (*with enthusiasm*).

There is nothing uglier
Than treachery. A brand through life: and withered
Down to the dust, no tear would follow thee.

Thy shame would through thy sear-cloths break ;
 Thy scutcheon,
 That of a *Traitor* !

(After a pause, solemnly.)

You will release my hand ?

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

More than I 'll vouch for.

Did I turn a rebel,
 So are your uncle and yourself sure.

THERESA.

Not so.

Our house is banned, proscribed.

Our ample lands

Unjustly confiscate.

WE have never sworn

Allegiance to the Elector.

I 'll define

What is a TRAITOR to you.

His dissembling
 Spreads o'er the heart, like leprosy, the fouler
 For its white pretence. He kisses hands, and cries,
 The better to deceive, All hail !—like Judas.
 And, sure as fire consumes this packet, shall,
 When earth and heaven are knit together, perish
 With the arch-rebel, Lucifer—THUS !—for ever !

(She thrusts the packet in the fire.)

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

Stop ! stop ! d'ye know what you are about ?

Mayhap

Receipts, and wills, and bills, and notes of hand,
 And Lord knows what of moment fill that bundle !

THERESA *(apart)*.

I waste my breath, and but degrade my nature,
 Appealing to *his* heart and honour, who,

Being mindless, owns not either.

By the Abbot

Misled, betrayed, I, utterly lost, start back

Aghast, *quite altered from the thing I was !*

Enter the ABBOT.

THE ABBOT.

My lord, how thrive you ?

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

More ambiguous

Than I could wish. But we are to be spliced.

THERESA (*in an agonized voice*).

He has drunk with adders ?

Sooner earth gape wide

And swallow me !

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

Would'st now back out, my lady ?

Your hand, in token of consent, you tendered.

(THE ABBOT *motions his hand to FITZ SIMPLE, who walks aside.*)

THE ABBOT (*apart to THERESA*).

Daughter, pray fall not off ; but to the Church,

In what, through me, she appointeth, be obedient :

Touch heaven !

THERESA.

Thy ghostly power I acknowledge ;

But since we spoke, alas ! my former nature

Is blanched, I skill not how ; only the world

Bears not its old appearance ; what was right

Looks wrong, in my eyes ; things indifferent,

Are so no longer ; that which *seemed* impossible,

Hath now become breathing reality.

Your rigour may

THE ABBOT (*sternly*).

Have there been half resolves ?

THERESA.

Might gold be held equivalent, whole lordships

THE ABBOT (*in a severe voice*).

All spent in masses, cannot buy up duty,
Or poise so rich advantage to our Church,
As smiles upon the forehead of thy pledge.
I tell thee, daughter,
If, which I knew not of, the act afflict thee,
The greater thy desert. You pay in tears
A sprinkling of your mass of moan hereafter;
But *here* they are impotent!
Could'st thou weep Fate from her determined purpose,
Think not to melt the will of Heaven's messenger,
Nor shake his balanced soul.

(*After a pause, in a determined tone.*)

'T is my decree,

Thou wilt do it!

THERESA (*in wild agony*).

My brain! Oh! what a pitfall have I
Fallen into unawares!

THE ABBOT.

Why clingest thou

Unto my raiment?

THERESA (*earnestly*).

Do not searing blushes
That pierce my cheek, betray me?

You'd not have me,

Without consent of soul, resign my hand?
My heart is fixed elsewhere.—I love Lord Julian!

THE ABBOT.

Him who conspires our ruin? *Pray, since when?*
Feminine caprice! Suppress this infant folly!
Love *him*? Now in constraint? The Lutheran?
Oh, fie!—for Godly shame!

(*In a low voice.*) The times are bustling :
Fitz Simple must to Derby . . . so these nuptials
We hasten. I should sin my intent to alter
For a sudden fancy.

(*To THERESA.*) Vain for thee to war with it !
You wed to-morrow ! To thy knees !

THERESA (*with low obeisance*).

Sir, bless me.

THE ABBOT.

So, Benedicite ! Thy peace is wrought
For ever, in this yielding !

THERESA.

Break my heart !

[*Exit THERESA.*]

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE (*advancing*).

Is she more pliant grown ?

THE ABBOT.

My lord, to-morrow
She'll honour you with her hand.

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

I'll follow her,

And make my protestations.

THE ABBOT.

Not at present.

We sign betimes.

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

(*Aside in agitation.*) A serious dilemma,
Considering !

THE ABBOT.

Did you speak ?

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

(*Aside in agitation.*) 'T is transportation,

If known, unless in Turkey. It will take
My brains a-pieces.

(*Aloud.*) For my politics,
I 'm dubious about 'em ; but I must
Join the Pretender, I suppose ?

THE ABBOT.

My lord,
I 'll prove how founded are King James' pretensions.
You 'll settle Simple manor on Theresa ?
Whose jointure . . . There are points which . . .
To my study !

[*Exeunt* THE ABBOT and MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.]

END OF ACT THIRD.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

*An apartment.**Enter THERESA and MARIAN.*

THERESA.

May I rely on this? Dear Marian, prithee
Sustain my feeble courage.

MARIAN.

'Las! my lady,
The Duke of Cumberland vows he'll leave no fortress,
Which harbours partizans of Stuart, unpunished.
Before 't is possible your wedlock can
Be solemnized, we shall be all arrested.

THERESA (*aside*).

What contrary emotions tear my soul!
I know not *where* to fix my thoughts; yet feel
A tender consolation, that, through Walter,
My imprisoned Julian and myself have opened
To each other all our hearts, and interchanged——

(*She takes a paper from her bosom, which she presses to her
lips.*)

Precious assurance of his love! Albeit

I'm rivalled by his clasping chains.

Oh, soon

May virtues, blown in him to full perfection—
Take—like that plant whose bending head creates
A second root—fresh growth within my breast
From intercourse of mixing hearts!

These news!

How my mind darkens that way! All a dream
I do.

But come, ye troops of the Elector!
This ceremonious horror stop, lest Fate
Make my self-slaughter righteousness!

Enter LADY VERNON.

LADY VERNON (*to THERESA*).

Dread news rides on the wind, the which preclude
All ceremony, so we straight fulfil
Our contract.

THERESA.

Rites which from herself transfer
Your grandchild, lack more state.

When I be mad,
Not knowing what I speak, I'll yield consent.

LADY VERNON.

How? Peevish elf!

Here wends the holy Abbot.
Plead to his reverence! Let *him* answer thee.

(*She turns away.*)

MARIAN (*aside to THERESA*).

Collect your failing spirits. There's no danger
You wed to-day aught but the true right head
Of every woman . . . her own will.

Enter the ABBOT.

(He is followed by Attendants with writings, inkstand-dish, &c. &c. Attendant places them on the table, and exit.)

ThERESA *(aside)*.

A sudden

Tremor invades my blood ! My inward strengths
Forsake me.

LADY VERNON *(with ironical emphasis)*.

These espousals must not be !

They lack the pomp should wait upon her grace !

THE ABBOT *(sternly to ThERESA)*.

That pomp thy footsteps lackey from henceforth,
As heretofore, you 'll find I've made my care,
Betide what may !

Thy soul's health 's on the hazard !

Unquestioning, gird thy nature ; string thy heart,
Unstinting, unevasive, to this service.

Thy bridegroom !

Receive him not with tears.

*(Turns away, and retires up the stage in discourse with
LADY VERNON.)*

MARIAN.

Oh, do not cast

Those scattered looks abroad ! You will be rescued.

What fit is this ?

(Report of musketry heard.)

There ! Credit me : Be seated.

(ThERESA seats herself on an ottoman near the end of the stage).

Enter MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE and LORD FRANCIS.

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

A great relief ! I was all of a cold drip,
And never dreamed of the Countess and our marriage.

And think you, ha ! they are fired in honour of me ?
Lord, what an ass I was !

LORD FRANCIS (*aside*).

And like to be !

(*To him.*) Behold your beauteous bride !

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

She's fairly welcome.

What an escape I feel ! *Considering !*

I am all a bath !

(*To THERESA.*) I kiss your beauteous hand ;
'Tis round and hot as . . as a cannon ball.

LORD FRANCIS (*aside*).

A warlike simile !

MARIAN (*to THERESA*).

Oh dear ! my lady,

Put colour in your cheek. Be true to yourself ;
There is no other fear.

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

This mute consent,
After the artillery, comes off quite soothing.

LORD FRANCIS.

Whisper soft things.

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

Go to ! I know not how.

(*THE ABBOT and LADY VERNON come forward.*)

THE ABBOT.

Thus only can we issue from this maze.
United to Lord Julian, Eastham's boast
Of loyalty and faith would soon dissolve,—
Be mere tradition !

But she's in the toil,
And we will twist it strong with all the ties
Of honour and of duty. Honest snare !

That Julian's desperate fury cannot break.
And for those letters ——

LADY VERNON.

They'll not be forthcoming.
Forget them. So the honours of our house
Upon Fitz Simple's noble line descend ;
True to their church and king.

(*The ABBOT advances to where THERESA is seated.*)

THE ABBOT.

Exchanging courtship ?

We will subscribe forthwith,
Both parties being agreed to it.

Lord Marquis !

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE (*confusedly*).

Yes,—no,—*no just impediment !*—'T will be
As well to set my hand ; and yet not either.
Good Lady Vernon, wilt vouchsafe a word first ?

LADY VERNON.

My lord, with me ?

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE (*in great agitation*).

I know not what to say !
Things make me wild ! Your ear !

(*The MARQUIS retires up the stage with LADY VERNON.*)

MARIAN.

She holds me hard,
But cannot speak. Alack ! alack ! Even now
The private vault that issues on the wood
Rings to the clang of King George' troops, whose coming
Walter attends, close to the ruined door.

THE ABBOT.

My lord, you trifle.

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

(*Coming forward with LADY VERNON.*)

In an instant!

(*To LADY VERNON.*) I

Am nonplussed! *Bigamy!*

LADY VERNON.

Your having wed,

Your rank and name withheld, a wench unknown,—

'Tis plain can never rise to do you wrong:

Then let it die untold.

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

I am transported!

Ominous words! Between ourselves, your son,

An awful man! To gainsay *him!*

THE ABBOT.

My lord!

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

I'll set my hand. There!

(*Having subscribed.*) In what Christmaspiece

Match you that Z and Simple?

LORD FRANCIS.

For a Simple

You beat all England hollow.

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

(*With affectionate emphasis.*) Dear Lord Francis!

MARION (*to THERESA*).

Oh! madam, rouse thee from this trance of anguish.

Why look so ghastly?

THE ABBOT.

Daughter, we await you.

(*He takes THERESA firmly by the hand, and advances with her to the table.*)

I pray no weakness.

MARIAN (*in trepidation*).

Walter, who was wont
Still to be near, not wanted, *now* to fail me!
I see him no where yet!

He has made fine work,
And drawn us on to ruin!

THE ABBOT.

I will guide thee.

THERESA (*abruptly, in a distracted tone*).

What motion, like to fearful shapes in dreams,
Hath broke my rest, but not to shake them off?
They haunt me on my waking!

Help me, Marian!

I am here, I know not how.

Off! Let me loose!

(*THERESA rushes from the table to where MARIAN stands, and clings to her.*)

MARIAN (*to THERESA*).

Only stand constant. Fear not, still I say.
Trust to my word.

THERESA.

I trust my heart.

THE ABBOT (*approaching THERESA*).

We are gone

Too far to start aside, like broken bow.

MARIAN (*aside*).

Ah me! Oh! hapless lady! I must something.

(*MARIAN goes to the table, takes up the papers, and, with them, makes her exit.*)

LORD FRANCIS.

Good uncle, best defer the nuptials
Until to-morrow

THE ABBOT.

Time's in labour. Terrors
Press to the birth! So we may have no freedom
Upon the morrow to perform the rites.

(*Sound of artillery.*)

LORD FRANCIS.

Hark!—I must see to our defence!

[*Exit* LORD FRANCIS.]

THE ABBOT (*to Attendants*).

Attend

My lord to the chapel.

(*To* MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.)

You will excuse her coyness.
Whose blood is undrawn by soft affection's lure.
We'll sign; then speed to say the holy words.

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE (*aside*).

Coyness! the stubborn queen!

Methinks her tricks

Savour of pale dislike. I none the less
Will marry her.

(*After a pause.*) And yet, *considering*!

[*Exit* MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE, *followed by Attendants.*]

THE ABBOT (*to* THERESA).

Who would pluck flowers upon the crater's brink
Must be scourged fiercely from the path that leads
To regions reddened by eternal wrath.

THERESA (*in a low appealing voice*).

Wherefore, oh, Heaven! am I girt with horror?

THE ABBOT.

Silence, weak worm! 'T is not for earth to question . . .

THERESA (*to LADY VERNON, in an agonized voice*).
Oh! let me turn to thee! Through bitterness
Of bursting anguish clasp thy knees. May Heaven
Melt down thy bosom's frozen sense to save me!
Grandmother, save me!

LADY VERNON (*turns away*).

Child! the rites expect thee.

(*Enter Attendant: tumult and noise of battle.*)

ATTENDANT.

My lord, Lord Francis . . .

THE ABBOT.

Speak it! What?

ATTENDANT.

He's captured.

The gates are fired.

THE ABBOT.

Hold out for some score minutes,
When I will join. The flames, they must be quenched.
Straight bring me word about it!

[*Exit Attendant.*

(*To THERESA.*) Shame on tears!

Sign, ere you take the nuptial sacrament.

THERESA (*apart*).

The majesty sits awful on his brow
O'erbears me! 'Tis a fearful pass; yet could I
Hold out for some score minutes!

That's a reed

For Hope to catch at!

THE ABBOT.

Who hath ta'en the deeds?

Too late to inquire.

(*Tumult.*) That die! A hasty rite.

(*To THERESA peremptorily.*)

The ceremonies wait thee. To the chapel!

THERESA (*firmly*.)

I WILL NOT STIR !

Here I will fix for ever ;

Here lose all sense.

THE ABBOT.

Not stir ?

THERESA (*with energy*).

Unless entangled

In the swift whirlwind ; unless life and motion
O'erwhelm the spot I stand on. See you not,
I grow into the earth ?

LADY VERNON.

My Lord Fitz Simple . . .

THERESA (*with determined energy*.)

I will part sooner with my soul of reason
Than wed that noble.

I am now wrought up,
Each spirit to its charge, which glows and swells
Till every springy nerve is active fire.
I'll act no solemn lie. Racks shall not force me !

Re-enter Attendant.

ATTENDANT.

My lord the fire's extinguished, but the tower
And keep in ruins.

If, as men report,

Lord Julian . . .

THERESA (*rusthing to him wildly*).

Julian, sayest thou ?

Raven, speak !

Why are you dumb when I command ? Know'st not,
What must have slipped my memory all this while,
I am Eastham's countess ?

What of Julian ?

ATTENDANT.

He must be buried 'neath the southern tower.

THERESA.

Breath! breath! breath! breath!

Somebody curse for me!

My passing bell! Abbot! thou murderer!

I make my appeal to Heaven. *There* my cause lies!

Oh, Julian! Julian!

(She sinks in the arms of the Attendant.)

THE ABBOT.

This error serves our purpose. Bear your lady

Unconscious to the chapel. Julian

Effected his escape.

LADY VERNON.

Oh, would he had perished!

*[Exit Attendant with THERESA in his arms, followed
by the ABBOT and LADY VERNON.]*

Enter WALTER.

WALTER (*alone*).

Cross Fate! Could I see Marian?

In the chapel!

Enter MARIAN.

MARIAN.

Don't you come near, or, as I have a life, I'll kill you

WALTER.

What, is she wed?

MARIAN.

More than three parts ere this.

You promise breaker!

WALTER

'T was the sudden flames

Spoiled all : The tumbling tower blocked up their passage.
Can nothing else be done ?

MARIAN.

The massive porch

Close on the garden side ?

WALTER.

Have you the key ?

Give it me, girl. The magic key . . the right one.

MARIAN.

It hangs up in the hall : Come with me thither,
Haste ! A few moments—

WALTER.

Get you to the postern ;

Open it wide. I'll hurry to the bastion
To hail King George's general.

MARIAN.

Fly like thought !

WALTER.

'T is Julian leads ! Girl, there's prevention yet !

[Exeunt severally.]

SCENE II.

The Chapel. The ABBOT, LADY VERNON, MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE, THERESA, Retinue, Attendants, &c. &c.

THE ABBOT.

Then thus I join your hands !

(Joins the hands of MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE and THERESA.)

THERESA *(bewildered)*.

Their eyes oppress me . .

Their glaring eyes ! Frail dream of shapes and horrors.

THE ABBOT *(solemnly)*.

(His hand on the head of THERESA.)

Ye saints, that, when apostacies abound,
Slumber, attend my prayer, and keep her faithful !
From whose first dawn of beauty I have watched
As steadfastly as ever captive men
Gaze after hours of the beauteous day.
Have watched, and so have saved thee from thyself,
And bless thee !

(Great tumult without.)

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

Thank you !

Have you sham fights acting ?

I abominate all playing with edge tools.

THERESA *(in a solemn voice)*.

Can God above permit this ? Hush, my soul !

'T is not for earth to question . . .

Enter Officer, followed by a rush of the household.

OFFICER.

The assailants
Have by the garden porch achieved the castle.

Enter MARIAN.

MARIAN (*rushing to THERESA*).
Your grace, they are here!

Ye cruel saints! 'T is done!

THERESA (*wildly*).

'T is all a mockery! I am not wedded.

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

My dear, how you forget yourself!—You are.

THERESA (*with delirious energy*).

You chill my heart! Off! Dare not thou to touch me,
Even with thine eye! Out of the world! Wilt not?
Then my own life blood!

(THERESA *snatches a dagger from the vest of MARQUIS
FITZ SIMPLE; as she raises it in the act to stab herself.*)

*Enter LORD JULIAN accoutred as a royal general, followed
by soldiers. He arrests her arm.*

LORD JULIAN.

Mine! Shed mine! If I

Arrive too late!

How's this? that ring? Great God!

THERESA (*with a faint scream*).

He is come! who only . . . Like a mist he rises.—
He gleams . . . he glimmers;—Ah! *not dead! not shade!*
How sure thy *very* self! Warm! breathing! dear!
I grow to thee, my *living* Julian!

(THERESA *sinks into the arms of JULIAN insensible.*)

THE ABBOT.

Oh, thrice-bless'd saving wedlock! Now I praise
My resolution.

LORD JULIAN (*with passionate wildness*).

Give me breath! Black mist
Clings like pollution round us! 'Tis the same
That's coffin'd up where dead men rot together,
It is so foul!

THE ABBOT.

My lord, resign that lady!
She is the lawful property of another.

LORD JULIAN (*violently*).

Resign my being! my blood! my life substantial!
My immortal soul! Come forth, who'd claim this heaven,
I'll spoil him for a worshipper.

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE (*aside*).

'T were best

Disclaim all title.

LORD JULIAN.

Who prefers a right,
Were his voice loud as thunder, I'd oppose
My breast unto him, . . . force a separation
Betwixt his spirit and its impious case.

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE (*aside*).

I sweat to hear him.

LORD JULIAN.

Who dares look on her,
I'll prove him mortal!

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE (*apart*).

Could I shift myself,
Now that the port is free? Some waiting maid
My only hindrance. I will cut her down.
All armed, like Pallas, valour springs within me!

LADY VERNON.

Grandson, from out your venomous thoughts no longer
Draw spleen.

(*Aside.*) I would the sound might strike him dumb.

(*Aloud.*) Theresa's married!

LORD JULIAN.

Mock my sense! Endurance

I here abjure thee! Vengeance be my good!

Soldiers, arrest Lord Gerald, Lady Vernon,

Marquis Fitz Simple,—Francis,—every soul

The roof of Eastham covers . . . save this maid!

(*Soldiers advance and secure the ABBOT and LADY
VERNON, &c. &c.*)

(*MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE slips behind, and makes his exit.*)

LORD JULIAN.

Remove her softness from my heart. There—bear her
Gently unto her couch.

(*MARIAN receives THERESA in her arms, and leads her
out. LORD JULIAN stands on one side, absorbed in
sorrow—clash of swords without.*)

WALTER (*without*).

Traitor to George the Second, I attach thee!

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE (*without*).

I yield! I never fight! You've wounded me!

*Re-enter MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE and WALTER, with one
or two others, with drawn swords.*

WALTER.

A scratch for which you may thank your awkwardness.

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

There's mischief in a scratch. You would draw me in
To be a rebel, forsooth! King George for ever!

WALTER (to JULIAN).

Marquis Fitz Simple . .

LORD JULIAN (*fiercely*).

If thou tenderest me,

Or *him*, let me not hear him named.

Detain him

In custody at present.

WALTER (to MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE).

You are not hurt ?

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

I am. Do you not see my clear pure blood drop ?

How do I know 't is not a mortal cut ?

And then my wife and little ones !

WALTER.

He is cracked !

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

Cannot confess in better time . . . Know all !

WALTER.

I'll seek some unguent. You are my charge, my lord.

MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.

(*To the ABBOT, in trepidation.*)

Dying, I would be shrived.

A mortal secret

Consumes my vitals ; and *considering* !

(*Exit WALTER with MARQUIS FITZ SIMPLE.*)

LADY VERNON.

Would he confess ? Undoing, all as all

Were void. Then Julian yet—I am mad with fear,

Lest my hate pine unsated.

Son, a word.

(*Aside to the ABBOT, significantly pointing to JULIAN.*)

That man is my lingering consumption, which

I care not how I am quit of.

THE ABBOT.

Madam, shame !

Devilish thy thoughts !

LADY VERNON (*significantly*).

Nay, in a manner, 't were
Good deed in Christ to quench the breath, wherein
He's wrapped, like silkworm, 'mid his folded clouds.

THE ABBOT.

To rob this altar were less impious
Than attempt sacrilege on holy virtue.
Bedlam ! refrain thy soul !

LADY VERNON (*with a bitter smile*).

Who'd dam the stream,
Boiling with hate, may find it burst its confines !
And in the flood——

THE ABBOT.

Such ravings make the roof
That harbours them more near to hell than heaven !

LORD JULIAN.

This buzzing in my brain, I am not apt for it.
Some *here* have struck my heart, some *here* who should
not,

And all the comfort left is to take vengeance ;
But *how*, I know not yet.

Be they confined

In their own chambers !

THE ABBOT (*aside to LADY VERNON*).

Truce, I pray, to anger !

I go to shrive the Marquis at his wish,

[*Exeunt the ABBOT and others in custody.*]

LADY VERNON (*aside*).

His eyeballs roll in anguish.

While his passions
Glow, they 'll be worked with ease, like heated steel.

(*To Guard.*) Give leave.

(*Aside.*) He starts, like flame from sleeping embers.

LORD JULIAN.

I said, begone! I will not hear a syllable.
Of all who shame the world, I most abhor
Thee and thy silver hairs! Out of my sight!
Lest, going mad, I tread upon thy neck.
Theresa lost to me? *Theresa married?*
Oh, depth of misery! Julian, curse thy birth,
And die.

LADY VERNON.

This fury is vain: the ill is done!

LORD JULIAN.

Ay, there it is, fell woman . . . there it is!
Never! Oh, never! and so dear! to call
Her mine.

LADY VERNON.

Dismiss these men who drink your breath;
I 'll open up content.

(*LORD JULIAN stamps.*)

[*Exit Guard.*]

LORD JULIAN.

I strike the earth!
'Tis all I can in this wide starless cave
To which thou hast doomed me.
Why hast used me thus?

LADY VERNON.

I, used you? Troth not so.

LORD JULIAN.

Yes, all *thy* doing!

*I told you . . . Ponder to release these bands,
Or, I revenge will study, that thou 'lt wail.
This deed, in pangs, might match the scorpion stings
I feel.*

Thy life 's in danger, and thy fame :
I 'll publish every tittle!

LADY VERNON.

Pray be calm.

LORD JULIAN (*with mad violence*).
As whirlpools, woman : beware !

LADY VERNON (*insidiously*).

There is a way
To snap these ties in twain ; but it asks hearts
Stouter than yours or mine.

LORD JULIAN.

But show a prospect
Of far-off freedom ; *there*, through seas of blood
I 'll wade. The stuff that at my inmost core
Lies hidden against need is stern . . .

LADY VERNON (*aside*).

Oh, doubtless !

Who can repudiate ! (*breaks off*.)

(*Solemnly.*) *That way* I 'll rain snares ?
(*Aloud.*) You talked, my lord, of blood and death.

LORD JULIAN.

You are right.

If with the marriage cancelled, *good* ; if not—
Still good, for then I taste revenge !

LADY VERNON.

Oh, ever !

Your passions thus have shook the seat of reason.

LORD JULIAN.

Untie, or break the knot. Propound some scheme
To annul, in slender space of time, this union.
So as it *be* annulled, I—Come!—*The means?*

LADY VERNON (*after a pause*).Thou namedst it! *Death!*LORD JULIAN (*in a voice of awe*).

Grandmother!

LADY VERNON.

He's but mortal!

Fitz Simple! *Mortal, and halfsped . . .*LORD JULIAN (*in a voice of horror*).

You would not . . .

LADY VERNON.

Not *I*, but *you*, to compass their divorce.

LORD JULIAN.

I am confounded! Such inhuman outrage
Unhinges thought. Thy giddy seat, hold Reason!
What's on thy tongue?

LADY VERNON.

A step! Attend me, grandson,

Directly in my chamber! No delay!

I'll there *unfold a means . . .* wilt come?

LORD JULIAN.

I feel

As fiends were plucking at my soul! *But she*
Another's!

LADY VERNON (*aside*).

Dread remorse avault!

LORD JULIAN.

My heart,

The cauldron, sends dark fumes into my brain.

LADY VERNON.

Wilt come?

LORD JULIAN.

Your chamber ! Doubt not I will follow.

LADY VERNON.

We'll talk it over there ; so—Fail me not !

[*Exit* LADY VERNON.]

LORD JULIAN.

Talk over *what* ? Thou *horror* ! Marshal me !

On . . . On my soul !

[*Exit* LORD JULIAN.]

Enter WALTER.

WALTER.

My lord, my lord, I have strange news for you !

(*Exit* WALTER *hurriedly*, *after* LORD JULIAN.)

END OF ACT FOURTH.

[*Between the Fourth and Fifth Acts an interval of nearly a fortnight is supposed to elapse.*]

ACT V.

SCENE I.

A grand Apartment in Eastham Castle.

Enter MARIAN and WALTER.

MARIAN.

Not *talk* of Lord Fitz Simple?

Is 't not startling

His taking French leave of his life, abruptly?

Well, *he* is earthed, and all his widow's grief,

An onion might express.

WALTER.

Your words are arrows.

MARIAN.

Why, for his *mal-adresse* should you impute

Blame to yourself? You know, your witnesses,

To perfect satisfaction of the inquest,

Held when the Stuart's flight relieved the laws,

Cleared you.

He's *suddenly* dead, and, did he cross me,
I should forget his ghostship.

If 't be true

That Prince Charles Stuart . . .

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WALTER.

He will never more
Spread civil war over the face of Britain.
The royal star of Stuart is set for ever !

His lordship with your lady. There's a bird . . .

MARIAN.

Has sung to me like tune. Do you remember,
(*Simpering.*) If ever somebody wed somebody ;
(*Tenderly.*) Come this way, Walter, dear !

[*Exit* MARIAN and WALTER.]

Enter THERESA and LORD JULIAN.

LORD JULIAN.

Your fealty in *excess* were foolishness.
Granting the cause of Stuart just, 't was ruined
For ever at Culloden's rout. You should not
Suffer such vain chimera cross our path,
To fright us from the goal of our content.

THERESA.

So close upon this awful, strange decease,
'T were wrong to think of marriage—Nay, our uncle . .

LORD JULIAN (*interrupting*).

Thou scrupulous piece of loveliness ! heed him not,
Whose views would never level with our wish,
Having used such violent means to strangle it.

THERESA.

Well then, endowed with all our house' possessions,
I'm thine, until my latest breath ;—Receive me !

JULIAN.

Thus, and *thus* seal thy gift !

I have not a soul
Spacious, to entertain this blessed pledge,
Which twists our lives, above the wrath of thunder
Ever to part again.

Enter the ABBOT.

THE ABBOT (*aside*).

Short time may show

In that you are too sanguine.

(*Aloud.*) Daughter, lady,
You have not, could not, *durst* not sure adventure,
'Gainst my injunction, mingle faith with him?

THERESA.

To what a point not long since I was driven,
At thy behest, my fractured heart had witnessed.
But Heaven's inscrutable will hath cancelled *that*.
For the rest, all peril's now blown over.

THE ABBOT.

Peril!

Life teems with 't! (*Solemnly.*)

Think on Lord Fitz Simple, nephew.

You start! So *he*, as earthquakes had struck in him,
Could he have known last week, arrayed in splendour,
How soon his untouched bridal sheets would furnish
All the last garments where to hide his sins in,
Tied with close knots against the day of judgment.
No warning! Horrible! It touches you!

(*Aside, in a deep painful tone.*)

And *me!* . I dare not think upon that drug
Beheld with Julian. (*Aloud.*)

You persist to join

Your wildfire fates in wedlock, though thereby
You stand as if a mine beneath your feet
Were ready to be sprung?

LORD JULIAN.

Didst augur truly,
'T were better thus to perish than live parted.

THE ABBOT (*to THERESA*).

Are *you* so wilful?

THERESA.

Sir, my choice is fixed.

THE ABBOT.

Then take the consequence.

(To JULIAN) You owe me justice,
And will fulfil our covenant, that Theresa,
Having accepted you . . . those documents . . .

LORD JULIAN.

Thou hadst best thyself apprise thy love of all.

(To THERESA.)

Sweet, your acceptance of my troth, involves
A knowledge may fall milder from the Abbot.
With whom withdraw awhile.

Unseal, my lord,

That will be worth her wonder.

(To THERESA *with marked earnestness.*)

But remember !

Thou art my bride elect. Thy lot, henceforth
Must be, Theresa, linked to mine as closely
As Althea's billet to the life of Calydon.

THERESA.

Julian, you have shot a trembling through my veins ;
What is 't impends ? Is there yet *more* to bear ?
Wherefore withdraw ? Thy wish ? Be it fulfilled.

LORD JULIAN.

Thy sex's paragon !

THE ABBOT (*abstractedly*).

These doubts : my soul
Weeps tears of burning gall to entertain them.

LORD JULIAN.

My lord, Theresa—gently break this secret,
Which, when she is fast mine own, that packet shall
Establish. All is forgiven.

THE ABBOT.

Packet, said you ?

My thoughts were elsewhere busied.

Lady countess . .

Not now since . . well, nor marchioness . . Theresa,
I will reveal what

THERESA.

Julian, stay for me.

THE ABBOT.

You are to understand, the Countess Vernon . .

*[Exeunt the ABBOT and THERESA.]**Enter* WALTER.

WALTER.

My lord, our military 'gin to murmur ;—
Style it hard service . .

LORD JULIAN.

Marshal them before me.

I'll give them their discharge. You'll favour me,
Henceforth forbear these pastimes.

WALTER.

Marry! Brew swipes! get children!—Teach the dears
Their catechism . . . learn it first myself!
Then where were you this hour?

LORD JULIAN.

Nay, good Walter.

WALTER.

I've done. Like Robinhood, I love maid Marian,
Whom, when your lordship

LORD JULIAN.

Well, thy farm's confirmed
Unto it a hundred acres shall be added,
What time

WALTER.

Sport royal! For a little John,
First, for a guinea!

LORD JULIAN.

Bring your prisoners hither.

[*Exit* WALTER.]

*Re-enter the ABBOT in great agitation, followed by
THERESA, pale and breathless.*

THE ABBOT.

Undone!—Our house!—The packet!

LORD JULIAN (*to* THERESA).

Thou explain!

THERESA.

Disinterested man! who wouldst sacrifice
Thyself to one, so cursed in her false eminence,
As the low-born Theresa!

LORD JULIAN.

Dost not love me?

THERESA.

My lord, thou knowest.

LORD JULIAN.

Then, by right Divine,
Thou hast titles infinite to top thy rank,
One day, as Eastham's countess.

THE ABBOT.

One day? Julian!

That hedgling, hatched in our proud eyrie, hath,
Through subtlety, consigned those proofs you trusted
With her, to flames.

Enter LADY VERNON, *behind.*

LORD JULIAN.

Theresa hath done this?

THERESA (*aside*).

Good angels, strengthen me!

(*Aloud.*) Oh! hear, the while

I guide ye out of this sad labyrinth.

(*To LORD JULIAN.*)

From words the abbot spoke, I rashly judged
That packet, in the event of Charles's triumph,
Would implicate thee.

Therefore I destroyed it.

(*To the ABBOT.*)

You aver, it did contain clear evidence
That I usurp your rights. Then I stand bound,
Oh, reverend lord, forthwith the hereditaments
Of Eastham to resign. In time, the title
Will follow; for, with single piety,
My dedicated vows shall enter where
Eternal happiness keeps residence.
So, with my humblest, best leave

LORD JULIAN.

Madness! Halt!

Theresa, whither goest thou?

THERESA.

Unto heaven!

One story lower.

THE ABBOT.

You compensate wisely.

With stretched-out nerves, obey thine inspiration,
And reach more eminent place than this world owneth.

LORD JULIAN (*breaking in*).

Theresa, hear him not. Upon *his* death
All were made even.

THERESA.

By thy bright example,
My soul, first kindled, but reflects those beams

That flowed of late from thee.

It were to shipwreck
That soul, to haggle with my obvious duty ;—
Death hath no keener pang. (*Going.*)

LORD JULIAN.

(*With earnest entreaty.*) You will not strangle
My new-born hopes, and turn mistaken duty
To a tombstone of your virtues? Immolation
That nature shakes at!—justice asks not! Pause!
Parting with all that's dear, each moment's precious!
How high she looks, and heavenly!

THERESA (*to the ABBOT*).

Widford Convent!

LORD JULIAN (*with intense emotion*).

To me she will not speak!

I sink! Despair,
Like seas, thou flowest upon me! Not a word?
Mercy!

THERESA (*in a voice of intense pathos*).

These tears speak for me. *Julian!*

(*As she is making her exit, enter LORD FRANCIS,
MARION, WALTER, and divers others, and soldiers.*)

(*LADY VERNON comes forward.*)

LADY VERNON.

Theresa, stay! Hear what will turn thy tears
To solemn thankfulness.

(*THERESA stops short.*)

(*Aside.*) The trial comes!

Down, weak compunction!

(*To JULIAN.*) There needs not, my lord,
Longer constraint.

LORD JULIAN (*to WALTER*).

Dismiss your men at arms.

WALTER.

Unyoke my merry men! Disperse! Break up!
Right about face! Each hurry towards his home!

(The Soldiers throw off their disguise, and discover themselves in suits of Lincoln-green, and then exeunt.)

Yon free troop, gentles, deem the use of time
Is to make light of it. When lachrymose,
Their tears infer not grief, but spring from laughter.

LORD FRANCIS *(to LORD JULIAN)*.

My lord, you'll yield a reason for this outrage?

WALTER.

Your noble brother stood your surety
With his royal highness, who, for life preserved,
Grateful, connived to blind you with a false
Siege, capture, masquerade.

We played at soldiers,
To hold your safety up, which, shallowly,
You meant to have placed in hazard.

LADY VERNON.

Wretched boy?

It seems, then, we are unchecked by misadventure
Of royal Charles?

LADY VERNON.

Good tidings! for the which
I arraign thee, sir, of murder!

(LORD JULIAN bows.)

THERESA.

Say'st thou, madam!
Speak'st thou to *Julian*? Murder!

THE ABBOT.

(Aside.) Oracles!
To my sad workings open!

LORD FRANCIS.

Shame betide you !
To breathe such taint upon your grandson's fame.

THERESA.

Horror is girding us about !

LADY VERNON.

He hath practised,
Julian, upon the life of the late marquis.

THERESA.

Fitz-Simple, of a wound, received by chance,
From hand of Walter, died.

LADY VERNON.

You are young : go to !
We that are old know much.

THERESA.

Tax rather Heaven,
Who made his deathful angel's dart my means
Of refuge.

LADY VERNON.

Reverend son, the evidence
Demands committal.

THERESA (*vehemently*).

Evidence ? Mere aspersions !
As the plague killing.

THE ABBOT.

Vot'ress of Heaven !
Thou hast no longer interest in earth's mires.

THERESA (*with enthusiasm*).

When Virtue stands arraigned, *her* cause is that
Of human nature, and the nearer spirit
The deeper interest.

LADY VERNON

Fond girl ! the love
Of thee suggested this blood-guiltiness.
Temptation, guerdon !

THERESA.

Still, you speak untruths.

LADY VERNON.

Walter, step forth. That night his soul departed,
Who, save yourself, entered the marquis' chamber ?

WALTER.

Lord Julian.

LADY VERNON.

Mark you, mistress ?

THERESA.

'Gainst a diamond
You strike with glassen hammers.

LADY VERNON (*to* WALTER).

On what errand ?

WALTER.

I did not hear : my patron bade me leave.

LADY VERNON.

During your absence drank the marquis aught ?

WALTER.

His prescribed febrifuge, your ladyship.

LADY VERNON.

And on your lord's departure became sick ?

WALTER.

And suddenly expired.

LADY VERNON.

My reverend son,
I missed that eve, from private laboratory,
A case of poison.

THE ABBOT.

And I met my nephew
Just rushing from your chamber. On his cheek
Guilt glared in conscious dye. That *very* case
He held, exclaiming,

“ Abbot, tell your bridegroom,
I’ll bring these nuptials to a period,
And *that* right soon. I’ll make him rue the hour
He wed Theresa !” Driven by sudden gust,
I deemed, he spake, but feared not, that his soul
Would straight be dashed on guilt.

The death which followed
Struck on my mind a painful doubt, which I
Crushed, as I would a viper in the shell.

LADY VERNON.

I have two witnesses, that case was borne,
By Julian, as he passed to the marquis’ chamber.
The proofs are cogent ; thoughts, and words, and deeds,
Cohering, must compel belief of justice.

THE ABBOT.

Lord Julian be committed on this charge
To the county gaol . . .

LORD FRANCIS.

My brother can’t be guilty.

THERESA.

Guilty ! Who talks of *guilt* ? My Julian’s soul
Is free as lark in heaven !

(*To JULIAN*) Crush this slander !

LADY VERNON.

Observe his eyes on the blind earth are fixed :
The adder not more deaf ! his tongue is mute ;
Drooping is proof of innocence ! Is it not ?
’T is wonderful how abashed a murderer looks !
Guilty, upon my honour !

THERESA.

Then condemn
The cradled babe of capital offence !

THE ABBOTT.

For *thy* love his immortal soul, which should
Sun-like aspire, above the reek of sin,
Julian hath ruined !

LADY VERNON.

His fate be our redemption.
I draw forth Baldwin's precious revelation.

(*She produces the packet.*)

THERESA (*wildly*).

Where was it found ? I'd touch it, for my reason
Doth so conspire against my eyes and ears,
That 't is my only test . . . The roll, momentous,
Which *you* restored, *I* burned ?

LADY VERNON.

As you imagined.
That owned like superscription, whence I drew,
Being doubtful of your promise, these contents,
Waste paper substituting.

LORD FRANCIS.

Fine enigmas !

LADY VERNON.

Since Julian's blood-guiltiness must bring
His life within the penal stroke of law,
You, my Lord Francis, are presumptive heir.
I need demur no longer, lest our rank
Be desecrated by a Lutheran race.
Substantiate by my acknowledgment,
Before all present, *these* confirm thee, Gerald,
Tenth Earl of Eastham.

JULIAN, *who had stood apart for a long time silent and
disconsolate, rushes forward.*)

LORD JULIAN (*with a burst of exultation*).

Heaven! Accept my thanks!
My stifled groans of agony have pierced
Thy ponderous arch!

Theresa, thou art absolved
(The title of the abbot being established)
From thy burnt-offering of peace to honour.
My own again! Recalled from living death!
Scatter thy smiles like sunshine!

THERESA.

There will rise,
Though I ne'er join the convent's loud hosannahs,
An everlasting hymn within my heart
For this great mercy.

LORD JULIAN.

Love, thou know'st I'm guiltless.

THERESA.

Fix on thy heart thy hand,—Next question *here*:
Our souls are one—Count?

LORD JULIAN.

Sparkling through tears,
Like rainbow, dance into my very soul,
The while I hear thy voice, add, thou'lt be mine!

THERESA (*with gasping eagerness*).

Ay, Julian, will I! To thy fortunes cling,
Until our souls mix *thus* like rushing waters!

(*They embrace.*)

THE ABBOT (*to THERESA*).

You have forgot the crime with which he is charged.

THERESA.

In sooth I had; and yet it matters not.

THE ABBOT.

*Murder! Thy husband's murder! Upon grounds
Which must convict him.*

*Would you to his dungeon!
This poisoner . . .*

THERESA.

Reverend lord?

THE ABBOT.

The condemned cell!

And what ensues?

*That ghastly gaze betrays
Thy heart's thrill answer.*

THERESA.

*I am no child, Lord Abbot,
To start at shadows, since my Julian's heart
Reflects its truth and courage—dread effulgence
Of his clear spotless conscience—on mine own.*

(With glowing enthusiasm.)

*Know, on that scaffold, with the death man by,
I'd stand beside him in my faith to the last;
More proud to think myself that man's betrothed,
Than seated on an emperor's throne!*

LORD JULIAN (*affectionately*).

My angel!

*A plume of light rests on thy beauteous brow;
Thy truth hath filled the silent heavens with joy.*

LADY VERNON.

Away with him to prison!

LORD JULIAN.

*Stunned erewhiles,
You dared arraign me.—Now, my soul emerges
From dark confusion, your foul charge be silenced!*

I sought the late Lord Marquis, by command

Of his royal highness, to announce his being
Under arrest. By like authority,
I ought before to have warned you, in this realm,
A Jesuit priest, on summary conviction,
Must suffer . . .

THE ABBOT.

Martyrdom!

You are committed

To prison!

LADY VERNON.

Thence to *Death!* Away!

LORD JULIAN (*to LADY VERNON*).

What proof

The phial, you say, I abstracted from your room
Held poison?

THE ABBOT.

Why, your victim's death, which loudly
You vowed to accomplish with it.

LADY VERNON.

I essayed

Therewith experiments on venomous creatures.
'T was trebly wrapped . . . thrice sealed with private seal,
Labelled in Marion's large characters—"Poison!"
As many here can witness. Cursed potion!
With which thou'st lulled thy rival to his doom,
Oh! that I had it back!

LORD JULIAN.

(*Drawing the case from his vest.*)

HERE THEN RECEIVE IT!

Wrapped, sealed, untouched, unopened!

THERESA.

Julian! give me!

Thus let me clasp it! 'Tis untouched, unopened!
The poison is *here*!

LORD JULIAN.

My Lord Fitz Simple perished
By a higher will than *mine*.

LADY VERNON.

Not dead by *thee*?*(Takes the phial from THERESA, and examines it.)*

Help!—help! Uphold me whilst I look upon it!
I must perforce believe.

My brain turns giddy.

How? Lutheran blood in Eastham?

*That thought's madness!**(She retires to the back of the stage.)*

LORD JULIAN.

I learned from Walter, ere the Dowager
Placed in my hands her limed snare, the nuptials
You had solemnized were void.

THE ABBOT.

Divulged the marquis

That he confessed to me,—the prior marriage
He had contracted?

LORD JULIAN.

With one ignorant,
Some gipsy, of his rank.

I took the drug,
But to deceive the spleen of Lady Vernon.

ABBOT.

It has pleased Heaven the thread of her device
To snap! I am thankful.

(MARIAN rushes forward in agitation.)

MARIAN.

Oh, my lords!—my lords!

THE ABBOT.

Speak, girl!

MARIAN.

My Lady Vernon! She is dying! . . .
Hath swallowed that anodyne!

(They all rush to the back of the stage. The dispersion of the group discloses LADY VERNON reclining on a couch: they surround and hang over her.)

THE ABBOT.

Thou wretched woman!
Wherefore this fatal deed?

LADY VERNON *(in a faint voice)*.

I could not witness
The house distinguished by my sires, profaned
By recreant head.

LORD JULIAN.

Oh! bitter wrath!

THE ABBOT *(solemnly)*.

My mother,
One moment yet is thine,—the present. *Now!*
Lift up thine eyes!

(The ABBOT raises the cross on high,)

LADY VERNON *(very faintly)*.

That cross! My spirit melts
Out at my eyes! . . . Hold it still nearer . . . *Nearer!*
I've sinned!

Where's Julian? Come closer to me.

LORD JULIAN.

What shall I say to ease thee?

LADY VERNON.

Say we are friends.
Exchange forgivenesses. All's well! And yet,
Oh! that I ne'er had . . .

(LADY VERNON dies.)

LORD FRANCIS.

Terrible !

LORD JULIAN.

She forgave me.

THERESA.

Reverend Father !

THE ABBOT (*to THERESA*).

Take my last blessing.

From my mother's corpse.

Abandoning my ancestral name, I go,
In some far savage land to uplift the cross,—
The scorn of man, until emblazed in heaven
Amid the roll of martyrs.

THERESA.

Julian, thou art grieved.

Oh, press my hand, sweet friend !

WALTER (*to MARIAN*).

Gad ! you press mine without my asking you !

MARIAN.

You'll promise not to play at soldiers more ?

LORD JULIAN.

Thy soft white palm, like plume of angel o'er me,
Touches my heart, and all therein is hushed.
Not happy, but at peace ; as, long ago,
On Sabbath evenings, when we both were children,
Close linked as now.

So may we fade away

Into eternity !

The Curtain falls.

END OF "SENSIBILITY."

END OF VOLUME I.

London :
Printed by STEWART and Murray,
Old Bailey.

YC 102530

